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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL SHORTCUT TO MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

A strand of soft blonde hair, a whispered threat in the night... they were the first warning of a gangland snatch that could only end in a one-way ride to Murder. Could Mike Shayne defy the hit contract that was already out on him, penetrate a dragnet of hidden, deadly foes—and come out with a kidnaped hostage—alive?

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SHORTCUT TO MURDER

A battered locket...a tuft of soft blonde hair...would they lead Mike Shayne to a girl's last fatal trysting place in the night—or to the signing of his own death warrant?



by Brett Halliday

MICHAEL SHAYNE paused in the entrance to the Hideaway to let his eyes grow accustomed to the dim lighting inside. Gradually the long bar on his right and the dining area on his left became easier to make out. The decor was nineteenth century bordello, with the color red predominating in the wallpaper, the vinyl furniture and the lighting.

Not a lot different from a hundred other bistros in Miami, but the Hideaway was a little

different. For the last couple of years, the Hideaway had been the place to go for the In-group drinking set.

At the far end of the bar Shayne spied the bony frame of Tim Rourke hunched over a glass like some huge grasshopper. Shayne strode down the bar and took a vacant stool next to the reporter.

"Hello, Mike," Rourke said. "I hope you don't mind meeting here instead of my office. The *News* finally got

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Complete in this issue

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



around to painting the city room, and a guy could pass out from the turpentine fumes."

Shayne shrugged. "It's all right with me. The banging of typewriters give me a headache anyway." He ordered a cognac from the bartender. "You said something about a job for a friend of yours?"

"Not a friend, exactly, but I know the guy and like him well enough. It's Nick Drago. He owns this place. What do you know about him, Mike?"

"A little, but go ahead and fill me in."

Rourke swirled the rye in his glass, causing the ice cubes to rattle like dice against the sides. "Nick is not exactly what you would call super smooth. Years ago he knocked around quite a bit, hiring out as muscle on certain jobs. Busted a few times, convicted twice for assault.

"He couldn't get into the service during World War II because of his record, but he signed on with the Merchant Marine. That seemed to have straightened him out. After the war he got married, moved to Miami, and opened a hamburger stand. He kept adding to them until today he owns a string of 'em along the East Coast. You've heard of Drago Burgers?"

"I've even eaten a few."

Shayne shuddered. "An inspiring tale, a regular Horatio Alger yarn, but what does he need with a private detective?"

Rourke polished off his drink, rattling the ice cubes against his teeth. "It has to do with his daughter. Nick can tell you about it better himself. We can go back to his office and talk to him if you're interested."

"Business isn't so great that I'm not interested in a possible fee." Shayne stood up. "Let's go see Mr. Drago. I hope he doesn't offer me a Drago Burger."

Unlike the public part of the Hideaway, Nick Drago's office was brightly lighted. The furniture was old and looked comfortable. The desk was a battered relic of less affluent days. The walls were papered with photos of sports celebrities, politicians, and show business personalities, all inscribed affectionately to Nick Drago.

The club owner himself paced nervously behind the desk, chewing worriedly on the end of a wooden match. When Shayne entered with Rourke, he hurried across the room to greet them.

Rourke said, "Nick, this is Mike Shayne, the detective I told you about."

Drago removed the match

from his mouth and stuck out a hand the size of a banjo.

"Hi," he said in a deep-throated growl.

"Hello," Shayne said, accepting Drago's hand. The man's grip was firm, his hand cool despite his obvious agitation.

Drago scrubbed his fingers through the brush of gray hair that covered his bullet head. He was a massive man whose body had not yet started to go to fat. Shayne placed his age in the late fifties.

Drago said, "I'm not sure a detective is what I need. In the old days I would have handled this myself, and somebody would've been sorry. But things are different now, or so everybody keeps telling me. Rourke tells me you're a good man, one that can be trusted."

"Suppose you tell me about it," Mike Shayne said. His gray eyes moved in inquiry to the corner of the office where a man of past thirty, with smooth, dark hair and a thin, patrician nose lounged in a leather armchair. His clothes were carefully tailored to look casual.

Following the direction of Shayne's glance, Drago said, "This is Drew Kellogg. He's a—friend of the family."

Shayne nodded in Kellogg's direction, mildly curious of

Drago's slight hesitation in making the introduction.

"I don't know how much Rourke here has told you," Drago said, "but this about my daughter, Angela. She's been snatched."

Shayne held up a hand. "Hold it, Mr. Drago, before you tell me more. Kidnapping isn't a job for a private detective. What you want is the police."

"No! No cops!" Drago said emphatically. "Look, I got no quarrel with the local law, but my dealings with cops in the past ain't been a whole lot of fun. I want my daughter back safe, Shayne, and whoever's got her said that if I called in the cops they'd kill her."

"Okay," Shayne said. "Let's hear the whole story."

"Monday, two days ago, I got a call here in the office. A whispery voice says, 'We got Angela. If you want to see her alive again get \$200,000 ready in bills no bigger than hundreds. Call the pigs and Angela's a dead chick. You'll hear from us again.'"

"I suppose you checked to make sure your daughter is really missing? That this isn't somebody's idea of a sick joke?"

"You think I'm stupid? Of course, I checked. I called up to Lynwood College outside of Boca Raton, where Angela's

going to school. She wasn't in class Monday or Tuesday, and her roommate ain't seen her since Sunday night. They all thought she'd slipped off home. Why the idiots didn't call me, I don't know."

"And what is it you want me to do?"

"Deliver the ransom when I hear again from the kidnapers."

Over the corner Drew Kellogg cleared his throat, and the others turned to look at him. "Of course, if it's possible to retain the money without endangering Angela in any way, we naturally expect you to do so."

"We?" Shayne asked.

"Drew and Angela were—are going to get married," Drago explained.

"I see. Why don't you want to deliver the ransom money yourself, Mr. Drago?"

"The guy on the phone made it clear that he didn't want me to do it."

"I wonder why?" Shayne mused.

Drago balled one hand into a huge fist and smacked it into his other palm. "I got a pretty good idea."

"And what's that?"

"I think I know who's behind this thing, and he's afraid I might recognize him or one of his flunkies."

"Are you saying you know

who kidnaped your daughter?"

"I can't prove it, but I'd lay heavy odds it's Chips Bianchi. Have you heard of him?"

Shayne nodded. He knew something of Bianchi. Vito "Chips" Bianchi, like Drago, also had a colorful background, and he also had come up the hard way. He owned a chain of nightclubs in most of the major cities in the South. He was known as a hard and ruthless man, not above using rough tactics in his business dealings.

"And what makes you think Bianchi grabbed your daughter?"

"He wants the Hideaway, and he wants it bad. He's got clubs in Atlanta, New Orleans, Nashville, all the important cities in the South, except Miami. Right now my club is Number One in Miami, so naturally he wants it."

"I told him the Hideaway wasn't for sale at any price. Hell, running the Hideaway is my whole life. The burger joints—" Drago shrugged. "I've turned the running of them over to a manager. Anyway, Bianchi got pretty sore when I wouldn't sell to him. And three days later I find my Angela's been kidnaped. If I have to pay two hundred grand, I'll be about cleaned out. When I bought this place, it took all my available cash. I even had to go

into hock. Out of pocket two hundred big ones, I may be forced to sell. That's what Bianchi's hoping for. No matter who I sell the place to, it'll wind up sooner or later in Bianchi's hands."

"Have you said anything to Bianchi about this kidnaping?"

"Believe me, Shayne, I would have, except for Tim here."

Rourke spoke up. "Nick was all for going over to break Bianchi into little pieces. I convinced him that he wasn't going to do Angela any good that way."

"I agree," Shayne said. "I'll have a chat with Bianchi myself."

"Does that mean you're taking the case?" Drago asked.

"I'll do what I can," Shayne replied. "Do you happen to have a picture of your daughter handy?"

Drago picked up a framed photograph from his desk, brushed at the glass with his sleeve, studied it for a long moment, then handed it to Shayne.

The photo showed a seriously-looking girl. She had soft blonde hair to her shoulders and eyes of a startling blue. Undeniably, Angela Drago was a pretty girl. Her eyes were perhaps a millimeter too close together, her lips a fraction too



thin for her to be considered really beautiful.

"That was taken last fall for her yearbook," Drago said, his voice thickening with pride. "She's only nineteen, but already a junior. Angela's brains must come from her mother, God rest her soul. Angela got straight A's in high school. What do you think of that?"

"Good for her," Shayne said. "How did you and your daughter get along, Mr. Drago?"

Drago blinked at the unexpected question. "Get along? Why, we get along fine. Just fine. Angela's always been a good girl. A little on the quiet side, maybe, but then that she got from her mother, too. Angela always did what I told her. She and me never had any

trouble." Drago's glance strayed up to a corner of the office ceiling, and he frowned as though he'd spotted an unsightly cobweb. "Except—"

"Except what?" Shayne prompted.

Drago shook his bullet head. "Nothing. Nothing that has anything to do with this."

Shayne let it go for the time being. Drago struck him as a man who would be stubborn about telling anything he decided not to. "Have you got Bianchi's address?"

"Yeah. He's leasing a place out in Olympia Heights." Drago scribbled a street number on a piece of paper and handed it to Shayne.

The redhead tucked the paper away in a pocket. "And I can use that picture of Angela, if you don't mind."

Drago picked up the framed photograph again, handling it reverently. "You'll be careful with it?"

"I'll be careful with it," Shayne assured him.

With some reluctance, Drago handed over the picture.

"I'll see Bianchi in the morning and then I'll be in touch with you," Shayne said, and walked out with Tim Rourke.

"What do you think?" Rourke asked.

"The guy really loves his

daughter, that's clear. I also think he isn't telling me everything. What's the story on this Drew Kellogg?"

Rourke's long, thin face pulled into a sour expression. "He's Old Family Southern. His people once had a big plantation up around Charleston. I guess his father made some stupid investments and about wiped out the family fortune. I don't know how Nick happened to meet young Kellogg, but he considers him class with a capital K. Just the type who would make a decorative husband for Angela. And he's all for that. Nick's not too proud of the way he started out in life. I think he figures he can make up for that by marrying Angela off to a man with a good family background."

"How did Angela feel about it?"

Rourke grew thoughtful. "It's hard to say, Mike. In some ways Angela is a strange girl. I always got the feeling that she was holding a lot inside, and that the face she gave to the world might not be the real one. But to answer your question, I don't think she's too crazy about Kellogg, but on the other hand she might marry him just to please her father."

"And do you think Chips Bianchi grabbed her?"

"I don't know. I think he's

capable of it. When Bianchi wants something as bad as he seems to want the Hideaway, he'll go to great lengths to get it."

Shayne left Tim Rourke outside the Hideaway and drove to his apartment-hotel on N.E. Second Avenue. He dreamed that night of a blonde girl and a faceless man who held her captive.

II

THE HOUSE in Olympia Heights leased by Chips Bianchi was new and expensive, and somehow impersonal looking, like a realtor's model home. The garage doors were closed, the draperies pulled, the front lawn perfectly manicured and unmarked by any signs of ever being trod on by human feet.

Mike Shayne pushed the doorbell button and listened to the muted chimes somewhere inside.

The man who opened the door was tall and rangy, solidly built, probably in his forties. He had a neat mustache, and his dark hair, touched lightly with gray, was combed straight back from a broad forehead. His eyes, behind dark-rimmed glasses, were hooded and revealed nothing. He waited for the redhead to speak.

"Mr. Bianchi?"

"Yes?" It was a question.

"I'm Michael Shayne. I'm here representing Nick Drago."

Bianchi hesitated for a second. Then he shrugged narrow shoulders and stood aside, motioning Shayne into the living room.

"Come in, Shayne. I got the impression the last time I spoke to Nick that he wasn't interested in dealing with me. I hope you're here to tell me he's changed his mind."

Shayne surveyed the room and the furnishings. It had the same un-lived-in look as the outside of the house.

"This place is only temporary," Bianchi said, as though reading Shayne's thoughts. "I like to live in style wherever I go, but I hate hotels."

In front of the stone fireplace stood a young man with brown eyes and a bald pink scalp with a tiny fringe of sandy hair remaining on the back of his head. He looked at Bianchi as though for permission to speak.

"This is my son, Teddy," Bianchi said in an off-handed manner.

Shayne shook the young man's hand, noting that his dark, conservative suit was a mate to the one his father wore. The effect of the bald head and drab clothing made Teddy Bianchi look to be in his forties,

but the unlined face and clear eyes were those of a very young man.

"How about some coffee, Shayne?" Bianchi asked the detective.

"Fine."

"Teddy, go make us some coffee," Bianchi said in a commanding voice.

Wordlessly, Teddy nodded and hurried out of the room. Bianchi gazed after him, shaking his head.

"When I think of the hopes I had for that boy—He lost his mother when he was ten, and I've tried to make a man out of him, but, well, he simply doesn't seem to have it here." Bianchi thumped his own flat stomach with his fist to show where his son didn't have it.

"Can we get down to business?" Shayne asked.

"Sure. Has Drago decided to accept my offer for the Hideaway? I think it's more than generous."

"Not exactly. He's much more interested in talking about Angela."

"Angela? Nick's daughter?" Bianchi's brow wrinkled in a puzzled frown, but his dark eyes remained hooded and unreadable.

"She's missing," Shayne said.

"I'm sorry to hear that, but I don't see what it has to do with

me. These kids nowadays are always running off."

"That's not the way it was. Drago got a call telling him to get together \$200,000 in ransom money. He has an idea you might know something about it."

Bianchi took a step closer, and his voice assumed a hard edge. "Mister, are you saying that I snatched Angela Drago?"

Shayne's gray eyes narrowed. "Back off, Bianchi. I don't like people breathing on my necktie, and I don't like your tone of voice."

For a moment the two men stood toe to toe, then Bianchi took a step back and shrugged.

"It's damned ridiculous. Why would I do anything as crazy as—Wait a minute." He snapped his fingers. "Nick has to put himself in a hole to come up with the ransom money, right? Which means he may have to sell the Hideaway, and so he thinks I engineered the whole thing."

"That's about what he has in mind, yes."

"Well, let him think what he wants. And then let him go ahead and try to prove it."

Teddy came back into the room carrying a tray with two cups on it. "Here's the coffee, Dad."

"Put it down somewhere," Bianchi snapped. "We won't be

needing it. Shayne, I don't know your part in this, but you go back and tell Drago that I don't have his daughter, and I don't know who does. What's more, I don't care. If this forces him to sell out, that's his tough luck. You might also tell him he'd better make his decision before the price I offered him starts going down."

"I'll give him your message," Shayne said. He glanced at the boy. "So long, Teddy."

Startled, the youth started to respond, then glanced at his father. Bianchi set his mouth in a thin line, and Teddy turned away without speaking.

Shayne had to let himself out. He wondered, with a wry grin, what Bianchi would think when he learned his visitor had been a private detective!

III

LUCY HAMILTON glanced up from her desk as Mike Shayne walked into his outer office. She pushed back a fall of long brown hair and smiled warmly at him.

"Hi, angel," Shayne said. "Any calls?"

Lucy consulted her note pad.

"A few. A man called to ask if you would handle his divorce case, your liquor dealer got a shipment of your favorite

cognac and wants to know if you want your usual order. A lady called, wondering if you would speak to a group of mystery writers, and Nick Drago called but wouldn't leave a message."

"The answers are no, yes, maybe, and I'll call Drago right back."

"That's what I told all of them," Lucy said.

Shayne grinned, flipped a hand at her and went on into his inner office. He spiraled his Panama on to the hook and picked up the telephone on his desk. He dialed Nick Drago's number at the Hideaway and ran his fingers thoughtfully through his coarse red hair while the receiver buzzed in his ear.

Nick Drago's voice came on at the third ring.

"Yeah?"

"This is Mike Shayne, Mr. Drago."

"Shayne—" Drago's voice quickened. "I got another call from the kidnapers."

"Same voice?"

"Same voice, sounded like. He told me where to drop the money. Tonight. And he said, 'Don't come yourself.'"

"I'll be right out," Shayne said. "Sit tight until I get there."

Twenty minutes later, Shayne sat across the desk from

Nick Drago in the office of the Hideaway. On the desk stood a fat leather satchel.

"Before we make any plans," Shayne said, "are you sure you don't want to call in the police? Now's the time, if you do!"

"No way," Drago said strongly. "If you don't want to handle it for me, I'll get somebody who will. All I want right now is to get Angela back safe and sound, and a bunch of cops stumbling around won't help."

"Okay." Shayne shrugged his acceptance of the man's decision. "It's your money. When and where is the exchange supposed to be made?"

"Eleven o'clock tonight. You're to park on Milam Dairy Road near the bridge over the canal, the one slightly north of the airport. They said stay in the car and somebody will contact you. As soon as they're sure you brought all the money, they'll turn Angela loose."

"Let's hope so," Shayne said.

"It's the only chance I've got, Shayne. The only chance Angela's got."

"Does anybody else know about this?"

"Only you and me."

"Good! Let's keep it that way for the time being."

Shayne got up and started for the office door.

"Where you going?" Drago asked sharply.

"It's only eight o'clock. We can't do much for a couple of hours. I don't know about you, but I'm going to have some dinner."

"Oh, sure," Drago said. "I didn't mean to sound like—Have dinner here, Shayne. Go ahead and order anything you want. It's on the house."

"Thanks, I'll do that," Shayne said, and went out through the door, almost colliding with Drew Kellogg on the way in.

"Hello, Mr. Shayne," Kellogg said, grinning. Then he changed his expression to one of concern. "Anything new on Angela?"

"No."

"Oh. Well, I guess about all we can do now is wait," Kellogg said.

"That seems to be about it," Shayne said, and continued on into the dining room. He could feel Kellogg's gaze on him questioningly as he walked away.

IV

AFTER A rare filet mignon and a leisurely three cups of coffee Mike Shayne was back in Drago's office.

Drago eyed him appraisingly. "Like the food here?" "It's good, very good."

Drago beamed proudly. "Best food in Miami."

Shayne picked up the satchel of money and started for the door.

Drago resumed his worried expression. "You'll let me know as soon as anything happens?"

"I'll let you know. Stay put until you hear from me."

"Don't worry. I won't even get up from this desk."

Before he left the Hideaway, Shayne quickly scanned the dining area and the bar for any sign of Drew Kellogg, but Angela's would-be husband was nowhere in sight.

Shayne left the Hideaway by a back door and got into his car, setting the satchel down on the floorboards by his feet. He headed north toward the expressway that would take him out past Miami International to Milam Dairy Road. Officially it was now N.W. 72nd Avenue, but most Miamians still referred to it by the old name.

Midweek traffic was light at ten, and Shayne had his pick of lanes on the expressway. He had gone barely a mile when he became aware that the same pair of headlights was staying a measured distance behind him.

The redhead tried a couple

of lane changes, and varied his speed to be sure, but the other car tagged him as if they were a team. With a shrug Shayne steadied his speed, then and kept in the number one lane to make it easy as possible for his tail. It was obviously not a professional, and Shayne's purpose tonight was to make contact, not to lose a tail.

As he turned off the expressway, Shayne slowed so he could see who fell in behind. He watched as a forest-green Jaguar slid through a pool of light thrown by a street lamp. Shayne snorted in derision. Of all the damn fool conspicuous automobiles to pick for a shadow job!

Shaking his head, Shayne continued up the road, rolling his window closed against the thunder of a jetliner overhead.

Not too far beyond the concrete bridge across the canal Shayne pulled over and parked. He punched off his headlights and watched as the Jag cruised past slowly. There were no convenient blocks out there for his follower to go around, so Shayne lit a cigarette and waited for him to come back.

Pretty soon he did. Shayne saw the oncoming headlights blink out about two hundred yards ahead, but there was enough light spilling over from the airport runways for him to

make out the Jaguar rolling closer and finally coming to a halt facing him on the opposite side of the road.

The minutes dragged by.

Shayne stared at the low, dark shape of the Jaguar until his eyeballs began to itch. No sign of any movement.

Eleven o'clock came. Eleven-fifteen. Eleven-thirty.

An occasional car drove past. None stopped or even slowed down.

What was he waiting for? By now the driver of the Jag had had plenty of time to see that Shayne had come alone. The money was here for him to pick up. What could he be waiting for?

Unless the Jag driver was not the kidnapер.

The redhead checked the time once again. Midnight.

Shayne wondered if the jag driver could be someone Drago had sent to keep tabs on him and the money. Would Drago risk that?

The redhead made a sound deep in his throat and snapped the ignition on. The engine exploded into life, and Shayne rammed the car forward. He wheeled across the road where the Jaguar was parked and slammed to a stop just before hitting it. His headlights lighting up the scene, Shayne sprang out of his door and pounded to the

side of the sports car. Jerking the door wide with one hand, he grabbed the driver by the shirt with the other and hauled him out onto the pavement.

It was Drew Kellogg!

"Shayne, please don't hit me!" Kellogg's voice was several notes higher than the urbane tone he had used back at the Hideaway.

Shayne pulled him upright, keeping his big fist cocked.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"I—I thought if the two of us were here, it would be, well, better all the way around."

"Did Nick Drago tell you to follow me?"

"No," Kellogg said hastily. "It was my own idea. He didn't even tell me you were taking the money out. But I saw you leave with the satchel and thought I'd better follow in case there was any trouble."

"You're the thoughtful one, all right," Shayne growled. He marched Kellogg around to the passenger side of his own car. "Get in!"

"But what about my car? I can't leave it away out here!"

"Oh, yes, you can. I want you right where I can lay my hands on you until I find out how big a fool you really are."

Kellogg started to protest further, but he weighed the look on the big redhead's face



and apparently decided against it. He climbed in obediently next to Shayne, carefully keeping his feet against the door on his side where they wouldn't touch the bag of money on the floor.

Neither man spoke during the drive back to the Hideaway.

Shayne parked in the rear lot and motioned Kellogg before him through the back and into Drago's office. The club owner sprang to his feet when the two men entered.

"What happened?"

"Sonny Boy here decided to follow me," Shayne said in disgust. "He very cleverly parked his inconspicuous Jaguar where anybody planning to make contact with me couldn't miss it. He fouled things up good. He tells me it was his own idea."

Drago stared at Kellogg. "Why did you do a stupid thing like that, Drew?"

Kellogg had regained much of his self-confidence. He said defiantly, "I thought it would be a good idea for somebody to keep an eye on this guy. After all, Nick, you don't know anything about him and neither do I."

Drago's battered face was turning a dark shade of red all the way to his scalp. With a visible effort he managed to keep his voice even.

"I know this much. Tim Rourke said he was all right, and I would trust a shark in my bathtub if Rourke said it was okay. Drew, I know you're worried about Angela as much as I am, but leave this to me. Okay?"

Kellogg drew himself up. "If

that's the way you want it, I'll stay out of it from now on."

"That's sure as hell the way I want it."

Kellogg aimed an icy glance at Shayne and stalked out of the office.

Once they were alone, Shayne thumped the satchel down on Drago's desk. "As soon as you count that, I'll be on my way. What you do now is up to you, but you'll be a fool to keep the police out of it now."

Drago pushed the satchel aside and said in an urgent voice, "Shayne, don't walk out on me now. Believe me, I coulda belted Drew for pulling an idiot stunt like that. But he was only trying to help. People like that don't understand how these things operate. Shayne, I need you now more than ever. I can't handle it alone." His tone was pleading. "I'll go off my rocker!"

Shayne considered for a moment. His first impulse was to walk out and let somebody else worry about the whole mess, but something about the rough, worried man across the desk touched him. Nick Drago hadn't always been on the right side, perhaps, but for a long time now he had worked hard and played fair according to his beliefs. Now he stood to lose the only two things in life that

he cared about, his daughter and the Hideaway.

He watched the man thrust a wooden match in his mouth and worry it between his teeth.

Shayne sighed and said, "On one condition. This is Thursday. If nothing happens by Saturday night, we call in the police. Until then I'll do what I can for you."

Drago came around the desk to seize the detective's hand. "It's a deal, Shayne. That's all I can ask. I'll play it by your rules all the way."

"Good. I want you to keep Kellogg on a leash so he doesn't get in the way again."

"Done."

"And you stay away from Bianchi."

Drago's eyes narrowed, but he nodded reluctant agreement.

"I don't know at this time whether Bianchi is in on this, but either way it won't help for you to make trouble with him right now."

"Okay, I get it."

"Now, I want names from you of anybody you can think of who knew Angela at Lynwood College."

Drago screwed his face up in thought. "Well, lemme see. Angela didn't talk a whole lot about college. Probably figured it wouldn't mean nothin' to me."

"Come on," Shayne prompted.

ed. "There must be some names."

"There's her roommate," Drago said, brightening. "Sandy Farrell. Angela did talk about her. I'll write down the address for you." He scribbled on a slip of paper, matchstick bobbing between his teeth.

Shayne stowed the piece of paper away in his wallet. "Anybody else?"

Drago squinted his eyes in thought. "There was a teacher she mentioned a couple of times. Lemme see, what was his name? Linker, that's it. A Mr. Linker."

"What does he teach?"

"Who knows? He teaches college. Ain't that enough?"

"I suppose it'll have to be. Is that it? Two names?"

This time Drago's glance slid away with a hint of evasion. "Like I told you, Angela never talked to me much about college."

"You're not holding out on me, are you, Nick?"

"Listen, I wouldn't keep anything back that I thought could help Angela."

Shayne studied the man's face for a few moments. Then he said, "All right, I'll take a run up to Lynwood in the morning and see what I can turn up."

Drago looked uncomfortable. "Uh, one thing, Shayne.

Nobody up there at the college knows about me. About how I used to be, I mean, back in the old days."

"Don't worry about it," Shayne reassured him. "As long as it doesn't help find your daughter, they won't learn anything from me. Now if anything breaks here while I'm gone, get in touch with my secretary, Miss Hamilton."

"Will do. And thanks again."

"It's too early to thank me for anything. Let's see if I do any good tomorrow. And remember, if there's no progress by Saturday night, we get the police in."

"Sure, sure, that's our deal."

"You'd better get some sleep, Nick. I'll be in touch tomorrow."

Shayne left the club and walked out into the night.

V

LYNWOOD COLLEGE was a neat arrangement of white buildings, green grass, and palm trees tucked away between Florida's Turnpike and the Dixie Highway along the coast. A private school, and an expensive one, Lynwood had sailed through the 1960's untouched by the riots and rebellions that saw buildings burned and classes shut down at less isolated institutions.

The town of Lynwood was little more than an annex to the college. It had a post office, bookstores, a couple of scrubbed-looking student taverns, and big old comfortable houses in the residential section.

The address Nick Drago had given Shayne was one of these old houses that had been divided up into rooms for students. There were no dorms at Lynwood College. Shayne checked the names over the mail slots and found what he was looking for: Angela Drago, Sandy Farrell.

A heavy woman with dark eyebrows came out of a door marked *Manager*.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"I'm looking for Sandy Farrell."

"Sandy's in class now, but she'll be back at noon for lunch. Would you like to leave a message?"

"No, thanks," the redhead said. "I'll come back at twelve."

Shayne left his car in the spacious student parking lot and strolled onto the campus. Lynwood students, he noted, were a comparatively clean shaven, short-haired, well-dressed lot. He asked a pair of coeds for the administration building and was directed to a sturdy, brick building at the head of the quadrangle. Inside, the directory told him where to

find the office of the registrar.

"Do you have an instructor here by the name of Linker?" Shayne asked the woman at the desk.

"Yes, that would be Dr. Edward Linker. He teaches sociology and political science."

"I'd like to talk to him if it's at all possible. It's about one of his students."

"Are you a parent?" the woman asked.

"No, but I represent a parent."

"In a moment, please, and I'll check Dr. Linker's schedule." The woman rifled through a card file and took out an eight-by-five card. "Dr. Linker has a class now in Adams Hall. That's the building you can see directly across the quad. The class is over in minutes, and he has a free period then."

Shayne thanked the woman and strode across to Adams Hall. He lounged outside on a stone bench until the faint ringing of a bell signaled the end of class.

When the last of the students had filed out, Shayne walked into the classroom where a narrow-shouldered man of around forty was packing papers and books into a bulging briefcase.

"Dr. Linker?"

"Yes?"

"My name is Michael

Shayne. I'm here representing Angela Drago's father."

Linker put on a pair of hornrimmed glasses and studied Shayne for a moment. "I've missed Angela in class this week."

"That's why I'm here. Mr. Drago is pretty worried. Do you have any idea what might have happened to her?"

"No, none at all. Angela was a very bright girl, a good student. She kept to herself most of the time. Quiet, you know. Didn't form any close friendships that I know about. She lived with a roommate, I understand. Have you contacted her?"

"Not yet. I intend to. There's nothing you can think of, then, that might account for her disappearance?"

"No, not really." Linker pulled off the glasses and chewed thoughtfully on the earpiece. "There was an episode last fall that was very unlike Angela. But I don't know if it's important now."

"Tell me about it."

"It's nothing much, really. Angela missed class for a couple of days and there were rumors to the effect that she had joined a hippie colony on the far side of town. It seems so incredible for a well-bred girl like Angela that I didn't put much stock in it. She came back to class after

missing two or three days, and that was the end of it. I must say that she seemed a bit more withdrawn and tense after that, but I couldn't tell you what it means. My field is the social sciences, not psychology."

Shayne handed the teacher his card. "Thanks, Dr. Linker. If you should think of anything else, I'd appreciate it if you'd give me a call. Collect, of course."

"I'll do that. And I'm sorry I missed you yesterday."

Shayne was instantly alert. "Yesterday?"

"Why, yes. There was a message that someone wanted to see me about Angela Drago. Wasn't it you?"

"No, it wasn't, but I'm glad you mentioned it."

Shayne walked back across the campus to his car. He wondered whether Drew Kellogg had been messing into the affair here too. It was natural, he supposed, for a young man to be worried about his intended, but somehow Shayne felt that Kellogg was more concerned about the \$200,000 ransom money.

The redhead drove back to the rooming house. This time he found Sandy Farrell at home. She was a plump, dark-haired girl with a friendly face. She opened the door to Shayne's knock holding a book

in her hand, marking her place with a finger.

"Hello, Sandy. I'm Michael Shayne. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about your roommate."

"Sure, come in. Is Angela in some kind of trouble?"

"Do you have any reason to think she might be?"

"No, not unless she got mixed up with that Joe Jardine again."

"And who's Joe Jardine?"

Sandy Farrell hesitated before answering. "Are you working with her father's lawyer? I told him all this yesterday."

"I'm working independently," Shayne said. "Can you describe this lawyer for me?"

"Sure. He was an older man than you and not quite as tall. Nice looking, you know, some gray in his hair, small mustache. He wore glasses with black frames. You know, I just now realized that he never told me his name."

Shayne didn't need a name. The girl had given a pretty accurate description of Chips Bianchi. What was he doing here at Lynwood College asking questions about Angela? It was something Shayne would have to find out when he got back to Miami.

"Tell me about this Joe Jardine."

"Well, that was the only thing that Angela ever did that you could call kinky, you know? At least the only thing I know about. We room together, but we really aren't all that close. She seemed to me to have something simmering deep down inside her. Up-tight, you know? But I couldn't guess what it was, and she never talked about anything except everyday stuff."

"Joe Jardine," Shayne reminded her.

"Yes. Well, out just west of town there are some old buildings that used to be a farm of some kind. A couple of years ago a bunch of kids moved in. Longhair types, you know? I heard they came down from Atlanta after the cops up there rousted them.

"Anyway, they never caused much trouble here, and they and the students pretty much keep away from each other. The people in town didn't like it much, but since the kids are living outside the city limits, they couldn't do much about it."

"Well, somehow Angela, of all people, got mixed up with one of them. That's Joe Jardine. He's supposed to be a painter or something, and he lives on the old farm with the rest. I guess Angela made the mistake of telling her father about him, because one day Mr.

Drago showed up here looking mad enough to kill somebody. He took Angela out somewhere and must have really put the fear into her. She came back looking pale as a ghost, and she never saw Joe Jardine after that. As far as I know, anyway."

"This Jardine never came around here?"

"Never. She always went to his place. I saw them together a couple times in her car. He sure didn't look like her type to me."

"And Sunday was the last time you saw Angela?"

"Yes. She left about ten o'clock in the morning for the drugstore, she said. It's about four blocks from here. She didn't even take her car."

"She didn't say anything about meeting anybody?"

"No."

"How was she dressed?"

"A dark blue skirt and a blue blouse, a lighter shade. Angela likes blue. It goes with her eyes."

"Any jewelry?"

"A gold locket in the shape of a heart was all she ever wore."

Shayne stood up and moved toward the door. "Thanks, Sandy. You've been a big help. How do I find this place where Jardine lives?"

"Take Lynwood Road west



of town about a mile. There's a dirt road there off to the left that leads up to the old farm." Sandy walked over and stood next to the detective. "Do you think Angela is okay?"

"I sure hope so. Good-by, Sandy."

Following the girl's directions, Shayne located the dirt road and drove north through a half mile of untended field that had grown over with tall weeds.

The farm consisted of a barn, a house and a couple of smaller outbuildings of wood that had been long without paint and had weathered in the sun and rain. There were no visible signs that anybody had tried to fix the place up.

Shayne pulled up before the sagging front porch of the house. A collection of nonde-

script vehicles stood in the yard, some wildly painted with psychedelic flowers and sunbursts, others long since rusted into junk.

Two long-haired youths sat on the edge of the porch, a half-gallon jug of red wine between them. They watched without expression as Shayne stepped out of his car and walked toward them.

"Is Joe Jardine around?" the redhead asked, taking in both of the young men with his glance.

One wore faded army fatigues, the other bib overalls with no shirt underneath.

"Never heard of him," said the one in fatigues.

"I don't think I know the name," said Overalls.

"Think harder, boys."

Shayne's voice was harsh and biting, and the young men on the porch shifted uneasily.

"Okay, so he lives here," said Overalls. "Joe's already ticked off because we told some dude yesterday where his room was, and damned if the cat didn't tear the place up while Joe was in town picking up his food stamps."

"This guy who was here yesterday. Fairly tall, grayish hair, mustache?"

"Yeah, that's the cat. He claimed to be a friend of Joe's. We should have known better,

but the guy sounded hip. You know him?"

"I know him," Shayne said shortly. "Where's Jardine?"

The pair on the porch looked at each other doubtfully. Finally the one in fatigues said, "First floor. It's the door right behind the stairs. Joe's not going to be happy to see you."

"That'll be my tough luck, won't it?" Shayne said, starting past them.

"You won't tell Joe who steered you?" Overalls called after him.

Shayne didn't bother to answer, but went on past the rickety stairway to the first door. It had once been painted a depressing shade of brown which had flaked away until it now resembled a skin disease. Shayne started to knock, changed his mind, pushed the door open and walked in.

Furnishings in the room included a metal cot, a camp chair, a card table with a kerosene lamp, and a broken-legged bureau. Beer cans, wine bottles, cigarette butts, food wrappers, and other less identifiable litter covered the bare floor. A combination of cheap incense and acrid marijuana fumes hung in the air like a bad memory.

On the cot lay a barefooted girl with short-cropped black hair. Huge shades covered her

eyes from brow to cheekbone. She wore a long, faded garment that concealed any figure she might have had. In the corner a young man sat cross-legged on the floor with a sketch pad in front of him. Light brown hair hung in tangles to his shoulders, and a patchy beard grew without enthusiasm on his lower face.

His head snapped up angrily at Shayne's abrupt and unannounced entrance.

"What is this? Who are you to come busting in here?"

"Are you Joe Jardine?" Shayne snapped.

"Yeah. What do you want?"

"I want to know about Angela Drago."

"Are you the dude who was here yesterday?"

"No."

"You're not the fuzz."

"My name is Michael Shayne. I'm a private detective. Angela's father is worried about her."

"Hey, man, that's tough, but I haven't seen the Drago chick since last fall. Her old man ought to know that. He told her to split from me or he'd yank her out of school, and she wouldn't get any more of those fat, yummy checks."

Shayne switched his gaze from Jardine to the girl on the cot.

"That's Zelda, man. Don't

mind her. I keep no secrets from Zelda."

"Do you know this Angela Drago?" the redhead asked the girl.

Zelda made an ugly sound with her lips. "You mean Little Miss Sugar and Spice? No, I didn't know her. From what I hear of her she makes me want to throw up. Miss Holier-Than-Thou with an old man who used to beat people up for a living!"

"Zelda wasn't crazy about the Drago chick," Jardine said with a broad grin. "What's the beef anyway, man?"

"Angela's missing."

"Do you want to search the room for her?" Jardine asked with labored sarcasm. "Your advance man did a pretty thorough job yesterday while we were out, but maybe he overlooked something. Maybe I chopped Angela up into little pieces and stuffed the mattress with her."

"You're a pretty funny guy, Jardine," Shayne said coldly. "If I find out you're lying to me, I'll be back and give you a chance to perform your act again."

Jardine curled his lip in an expression of contempt. Zelda lit a cigarette, her gestures exaggerated, and blew a streamer of smoke at Shayne. The redhead took a last look around

the squalid room and walked out.

He drove away from the derelict old farm and headed south for Boca Raton Road, where there was a toll plaza through which he could enter the Turnpike.

Driving south on the super-highway, Shayne tried to place the rather prim-looking blonde girl whose photograph he carried into the world of Joe Jardine. The picture wouldn't go together, yet she had apparently been pretty thick with Jardine. Thick enough to bring Nick Drago up from Miami to give his daughter an ultimatum. That was what Drago had been holding back. Shayne shook his head as he thought about people who hired private detectives to get them out of trouble, and then made the job tougher by not giving them all the pertinent information.

And what was Bianchi doing in Lynwood yesterday? Apparently he took the same route Shayne had followed, from Edward Linker the teacher to Sandy Farrell the roommate, winding up at the hippie colony. Bianchi evidently didn't get to talk to Jardine, but he went through his room.

For what? Shayne resolved to get the answers to those questions as soon as possible.

VI

"NICK DRAGO has called three times," Lucy Hamilton told Mike Shayne as he walked into his office. "He says it's very urgent, and he wants you to call him as soon as you come in."

"Thanks, angel. See if you can dig up the telephone number of Bianchi's place in Olympia Heights. It's probably unlisted, but you know the procedure. Here's the address."

Shayne gave Lucy the slip of paper with Bianchi's address and continued to his inner office. He picked up the phone and dialed the Hideaway. The club owner answered immediately.

"This is Shayne. What's up?"

"The guy with the whispery voice called again. He set up another ransom drop for tonight. He said this is my last chance to see Angela alive."

"When and where?"

"Eleven o'clock, same as last night, but a different place. The guy wouldn't tell me where. He said he'd call back in plenty time for somebody to get there with the dough. Oh yeah, he said if more'n one guy showed up this time I'd never see Angela again."

"Then you'd better make sure your would-be son-in-law stays out of it this time."

"Don't worry. Drew hasn't been around today. He doesn't know a thing about this, and I won't tell him."

"Good. I'll be over and we'll wait together for the guy to call back with last instructions."

Lucy Hamilton was at the door as Shayne hung up the phone.

"I have Bianchi's number for you. Do you want me to get him on the line?"

Shayne tugged thoughtfully at his ear lobe. "No, Lucy, it's not all that important right now. Give me the number and I'll get in touch with him later."

He drove to the Hideaway, and for the next two hours watched Nick Drago prowl his office like a caged beast as they waited for the call from the kidnaper. Drago had discarded his jacket, and his shirt was rumpled and damp with perspiration. He had chewed through a half-dozen matches.

"What do you think that crumb Bianchi wanted in Lynwood?" he asked the detective.

"That's something I intend to ask him the first chance I get."

"Bianchi's behind this. I knew it all along! I swear if he hurts Angela in any way I'll kill him!"

"You're jumping to conclusions, Nick."

"Maybe, and maybe not. He was there at the college, wasn't he? The last place anybody has seen Angela."

"It sounds like Bianchi from the description I got," Shayne admitted, "but it doesn't make sense for Bianchi to go around asking questions if he grabbed Angela there on Sunday."

"It don't hafta make sense to me," Drago growled. "I got a feeling in my gut that Bianchi's behind all this, and by God he's gonna pay for it."

The jangling telephone cut through the tension in the room like a knife. Drago motioned for Shayne to pick up the extension on the desk. Then he answered his own phone.

The voice on the other end spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"Listen hard, Drago. I'll say this one time only. Send your man with the money to Homestead Bayfront Park. He takes Canal Drive in toward the boat ramp, but turns south before he gets there on a road that leads through the mangroves. Have him drive exactly a half mile, then stop and leave his parking lights on. When we're sure he came alone and you're not pulling any more tricks, somebody will come and take the money."

"When will I see Angela?" Drago asked.

"If everything goes all right

tonight, she'll be free as a bird in the morning."

A click on the other end and the hum of the dial tone ended the conversation. Shayne hadn't been able to tell if the caller was male or female.

He checked his watch. "I've got over an hour to make it. The money ready?"

"Right here." Drago brought up the satchel from under his desk.

Shayne opened the satchel and glanced in. Satisfied, he snapped the satchel closed. "I'm taking you at your word that you'll stay put and not try anything to foul it up tonight."

"You've got my promise, Shayne. I want my girl back alive."

Shayne nodded and carried the money bag out the back door to his waiting car.

He drove south on the Dixie Highway through Coral Gables, past the University of Miami campus, through the quiet suburbs below the city, and turned off at Homestead. He headed west past the Air Force base toward the park on lower Biscayne Bay.

Canal Drive was well lighted, and Shayne followed the signs pointing toward the boat landing. Still, he almost missed the narrow road leading off into the mangroves. He checked the tenths on his mileage meter so

he would know when he had gone the right distance, and turned down the dark, twisty road.

Soon the lights from Canal Drive no longer penetrated the heavy tropical foliage. Shayne drove slowly, scanning the brush along both sides of the road as he went.

As the detective cautiously rounded a curve, a slim, feminine figure was caught in his headlights for just an instant. The beams highlighted the blonde hair and the frightened face long enough for Shayne to hit the brakes. As the car slammed to a stop, the girl snapped backwards out of sight as though jerked on the end of a rope.

Leaving his car lights burning, Shayne drew his .38 and charged in among the tangled roots of the mangroves and the elephant ear ferns, some of which grew as high as his shoulder.

He stopped and held his breath to listen intently. From somewhere up ahead came the unmistakeable sound of a woman sobbing. Shayne moved forward carefully now. The beams of the car's headlights were broken into irregular patches by the tangled undergrowth, and it became steadily darker as Shayne drew closer to the sobbing sounds.



From behind him came the faintest whisper of a sound as something rushed through the air toward his head. Shayne had no chance at all to take defensive action, and the dim outlines of the mangroves exploded into bright, painful light as something hard clubbed the back of his skull.

The light spun itself down to a pinpoint and winked out as Shayne hit the ground. He had a shadowy impression of low voices, then they too faded into nothing.

VII

THE FIRST sensation that came back was a gritty taste in

his mouth. Mike Shayne ground his teeth and tried to spit, but that only made his head ache worse.

What am I doing, he thought, with dirt in my mouth? But thinking made his head hurt too.

After what seemed a long, long time he was able to push himself up to a sitting position. He felt the back of his head. The coarse hair was stuck together with something wet, and it hurt like the devil. Shayne pressed gingerly on the wet spot, and it hurt more yet, but his skull seemed to be intact.

Using a gnarled tree trunk for leverage, Shayne pulled himself to his feet. He stood for a moment leaning on the tree while his head hammered, his stomach heaved, and the darkness around him whirled and dipped.

When the physical symptoms had subsided a bit, memory flooded back of where he was and what he had come here to do. A glance at the glowing dial of his wristwatch told Shayne he had been out for more than a half hour.

He swore aloud and began to pick his way unsteadily back toward his car. The headlights still lit up the narrow road. He pulled open the door, and was not at all surprised to find that

satchel containing Nick Drago's \$200,000 was gone.

Shayne dragged himself behind the wheel and started the engine. Slowly and painfully he backed out of the mangroves on to Canal Drive and headed out of the park. His first thought was to return to the Hideaway and fill Drago in, but on impulse he turned onto the Palmetto Expressway and headed toward Olympia Heights. Bianchi had some questions to answer, and Shayne was determined to get some answers even if he had to bounce Bianchi off the wall.

Lights burned in most of the rooms of the sprawling house as Shayne pulled into the driveway. He got out and strode across the velvety lawn to the front door. The melodious bonging of the door chimes was interrupted this time by the sound of breaking glass on the back side of the house. Shayne abandoned the front door and raced to the corner of the building just in time to see a running figure disappear over the embankment sloping down to another street.

The big redhead started to give chase, but with every running step his battered head clanged like a firehouse gong. When the scene started to fade to black, Shayne pulled up. He planted his feet apart to keep

from losing his balance. On the street below the embankment, out of his line of sight, a car door slammed and an engine ground to life. With a snarl of rubber the car took off.

When the throbbing in his skull eased somewhat, Shayne strode back toward the Bianchi house. Apparently no one else had been alerted by the commotion.

The breaking glass turned out to be from a set of sliding doors opening onto a patio from one of the bedrooms. At least it had been designed as a bedroom. Bianchi had furnished it with a desk, a couple of filing cabinets, and several cardboard boxes that seemed to contain business papers and office supplies. The room was a mess.

All the file drawers were pulled out, their contents dumped onto the floor. The cardboard cartons were upended, and the desk drawers, apparently individually locked, had been attacked with a jimmy. As Shayne stepped closer to examine the desk, he almost stepped onto the body of Chips Bianchi.

Bianchi lay on his back, partially hidden by the papers tossed from the boxes and files. On his face was an expression of mild surprise, and in the middle of his forehead was a bullet hole.

Shayne reached for the telephone on top of the desk. Holding the receiver carefully, he started to dial the Police Chief Will Gentry's private number at police headquarters. Then he hesitated. All the drawers in the desk, he noted, had been broken into except the bottom one on the right side. Jimmy marks around the edges caused Shayne to think that the killer must have been working on that one when he heard the doorbell.

Thoughtfully, Shayne replaced the receiver. It didn't take much effort to open that last drawer. Inside were a box of expensive cigars, a large bottle of aspirin, a legal-sized writing pad, and a heart-shaped gold locket. Shayne pressed the catch, and the locket flipped open into hinged halves.

On one side was a black and white photo of a handsome blonde woman. The hair styled placed the date of the picture somewhere in the late forties. The opposite side of the locket was empty. Tiny scratches around the edges indicated that whatever had been in that side had been removed.

Shayne snapped the locket closed and dropped it back where he had found it. As he started to close the drawer, his gaze was drawn to an envelope wedged in at the side of the

cigar box. The flap was unsealed. Using the end of a pencil, Shayne spread the envelope and looked inside. Tucked neatly in the bottom was a tuft of gently waved blonde hair.

The redhead exhaled between clenched teeth, then he pushed the drawer closed and made his call to Will Gentry.

VIII

IT WAS past two in the morning, and Mike Shayne sat across the desk from the solid figure of Will Gentry.

"How's your head, Mike?" Gentry growled in his habitual gruff voice.

Shayne touched the new bandages. "Like it may stay on."

"You deserve worse than a clout on the head for trying to handle a snatch on your own. Now there's a murder involved. At least one."

"Believe it or not," Shayne said, "I tried more than once to get my client to call in the police. I couldn't force him to, you know."

"Yeah, and now we know why, don't we? With the police in the case it would have been a lot tougher for him to kill Bianchi. "You think Drago did it?"

"Who else? There was

certainly no love lost between that pair. You told me that Drago wanted to go after Bianchi from the start. It looks like he finally cracked under the pressure, drove out to Olympia Heights, and put a bullet into Bianchi."

"And are you convinced Bianchi grabbed Angela Drago?"

"You found her locket in Bianchi's desk drawer. And I'll lay odds that blonde lock of hair is hers. It looks like Bianchi had those ready in case Drago had any doubts he was holding the girl."

"It's full of holes, Will, and you know it. Why would Drago tear the place apart looking for something? And what was Bianchi doing in Lynwood, in the first place?"

Gentry said bitingly, "Since everybody waited so long before bringing us into it, it might take a little while to answer all those questions."

"Are you going to tell me Drago somehow managed to beat me down to Homestead, wait for me in the park, knock me over the head and steal back his own dough?"

"We can't be sure that's related to the murder."

"Come on, Will," Shayne said. "You don't think a random mugger happened to be waiting there when I drove in

with \$200,000 on the seat beside me."

Gentry removed the soggy cigar butt from his mouth, stared at the flattened end, then clamped it between his teeth again. "No, I don't, Mike. I'll admit our case against Drago is pretty shaky, but so far he's the best suspect we have, so I'm gonna hold onto him. At least until his lawyer gets here with a writ."

"What about the girl?"

"What about her? I think she's dead. That's the usual thing in these cases. Oh, we'll look for her, of course, but it will surprise the hell out of me if we come up with anything other than a corpse."

"What about the girl I saw in the mangroves last night? I had the one quick look, but the blonde hair and slim build sure fits Angela Drago."

"It fits a million other girls too, Mike. I ask you, would the kidnapere be stupid enough to have the girl right there with him waiting for you to deliver the ransom? Not likely. That whole episode doesn't play right. Why should they knock you out, anyway? Your only purpose in being there was to deliver the money."

"That puzzles me, too," Shayne admitted. "I've got a couple of ideas I want to look into."

Gentry leaned forward and scowled at the redhead. "It would be nice if you'd pass your ideas along to the rest of us. This is a police case now, you know."

Shayne assumed an innocent look. "What could I possibly think of that you people haven't done already? No doubt you've contacted Drew Kellogg and Bianchi's son, Teddy."

"Naturally. Kellogg was at a party at the Biscayne Country Club."

"For a man whose financee is missing, he seems to bear up well."

"Yeah. And we located young Bianchi in Jacksonville. He was there on some business for his father and said he would fly back down right away."

"Very thorough."

"Thanks a lot," Gentry said with weighty sarcasm. "I'll make you a deal. I'll keep you informed about our activities if you'll be so good as to do the same for me."

Michael Shayne grinned at his old friend. "It's a deal, Will. Now, if you're through with me, I think I'll go home, take a couple of aspirins and go to bed."

"Go ahead," Gentry said. "I guess we can get in touch with you if we need you for anything."

"I won't be far away."

With a flip of his hand the redhead detective left Gentry's office and went down to the subterranean garage under the building. He got into his car and headed home. Questions tumbled through his mind about the kidnaping of Angela Drago and the murder of Bianchi. Nothing seemed to fit. There was no logic to people's actions. Yet Shayne knew that somewhere there was a logical answer. He would have to re-examine some of his basic premises and try thinking in a different direction. Tomorrow, that is, when his head would helpfully be clearer.

He slipped his car into his parking slot behind the apartment-hotel. As he started for the front entrance, something gleamed momentarily in the dark walkway between two buildings. A flash of metal where no metal should have been.

Shayne didn't slacken his pace, but ten feet before he would have stepped into the passageway he leaped sideways and flattened against the wall, shielded from the walkway by a narrow wooden annex that housed the electric meters for the building.

The redhead froze there against the wall, keeping his breathing shallow and muted. He waited. Time passed slowly.

From the walkway came the faintest of sounds, the barely audible scrape of shoe leather on concrete. Another long pause, then a soft, gritty sound as a foot was placed down.

Several more minutes went by. Then came a long, hissing exhalation of breath as the other man apparently tired of the game. Shayne watched the dark outline move in front of him toward the parking area. In the available light Shayne could make out the shoulder-length hair, the bold-patterned shirt, the flared trousers, and the gun held in an outthrust hand.

The detective gathered his rangy frame into a crouch and sprang. His shoulder caught the other man in the small of the back while his right hand groped for and found the hand holding the gun. As they fell together, Shayne smashed the other's knuckles on the concrete and the gun skittered away against the wall.

A cry of pain was wrenched from the man under Shayne. The other man was smaller than the detective, but he was wiry and quick. As he struggled to free himself, Shayne grabbed a handful of the long hair. He was astonished when it pulled away in his hand.

Abruptly, all the fight went out of the smaller man. Shayne sat back, one hand gripping the

long-haired wig, and stared at Teddy Bianchi.

"What the hell is the idea?" growled the redhead.

"You—you're with Nick Drago. He killed my father," Teddy said, voice quivering on the edge of a sob.

Shayne got to his feet and hauled the boy upright. "Come on upstairs and let's talk about that."

He retrieved the gun, a .32 automatic, from where it had fallen, and marched Teddy Bianchi around to the front entrance of the building.

Hiding the gun under his coat, the detective nodded to the night clerk, a thin, precise little man, and took Teddy Bianchi on up to his apartment. There, Teddy slumped into a chair, head down, hands clasped between his knees. Shayne swung into the kitchen, poured two glasses of cognac, brought them back and handed one to Teddy.

"Take a slug of that and you'll feel better."

The boy took a swallow and shuddered, coughing. But some color surged back into his face. He looked up then and met Shayne's gaze.

"The first thing we'd better get straight," Shayne said, "is I had nothing to do with your father's death. What's more, I'm not at all convinced that Nick

Drago did either. Now what are you trying to prove by this one-man revenge act of yours?"

"I—I had to do something, don't you see? Dad would have. I guess he never thought I was much of a man. He fought his way up from nothing to the top. I never had a chance to fight for anything, so I guess he thought I couldn't. When somebody killed him I had to, well, prove myself that I was man enough to avenge my father. The cops had Drago locked up so I couldn't go after him. You were working for Drago, so I figured you were in on it, too. I knew you'd have to come back here some time tonight, so I waited there for you in the passageway."

"And what were you going to do, Teddy, gun me down in cold blood?" Shayne asked dryly.

The boy's glance slid away. He pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed at his eyes. "I don't know. I had to feel like I was doing something. I suppose if it came right down to it I would never have pulled the trigger. I guess Dad was right. I'm not the man he was."

"Using a gun doesn't make a man a man, Teddy. A woman or a child or an idiot can use a gun. And plenty of them do. I'm going to keep this pistol of yours, and I'm not going to say



anything about what happened tonight. Your father's killer will be punished. I'll do all I can to see to it. But I want your word now that you'll try no more of this nonsense."

Teddy nodded miserably. "You have my word."

"Good." Shayne picked up the wig from the table where he'd tossed it on the way in, and threw it to the boy. "What was the idea of the phony hair, anyway?"

Teddy grinned self-consciously. "It's my way of trying to be part of the Now Generation. This is the age of hair, they say, and I lost most of mine by the time I was old enough to vote. When I go out places by myself or with a date I put on my hair and clothes like these. I'm

wearing now, so I'll fit in with the crowd. Dad would have laughed me out of the house had he seen me. You saw how he dressed. Straight, square, and sensible. When I was around him I dressed the same way to please him. But sometimes I had to get out and be part of what's happening. Pretty silly, huh?"

"Not all that silly," Shayne said. "It's what your generation calls doing your own thing, isn't it?" The detective's gray eyes became bright and sharp as a thought moved across his mind. "Let me see that wig again."

The boy handed over the hairpiece, and Shayne shook it out to its full length and studied it.

"The age of hair, huh?"

"Well, you sure don't see crew cuts any more," the boy said defensively.

"True enough," Shayne agreed. "Teddy, you may have given me an idea. Go on home now and let me sleep on it."

Teddy Bianchi caught the wig as Shayne tossed it back to him and started for the door. Before stepping out into the hall, he turned back.

"Mr. Shayne—I'm sorrier than I can say about what I almost did to you tonight."

"Forget it," Shayne growled. "Almost doesn't count."

After Teddy had gone

Shayne finished the cognac in his glass, stripped off his clothes and got into bed. He had been bashed on the head, robbed, and stalked by a kid with a gun. It had been a long, full night and he needed sleep. Tomorrow, he would pursue his new idea, and maybe before another night rolled around he would wrap the case up.

IX

RAIN FELL during the night, and the new day dawned bright and sparkling. The world seemed to have been scrubbed clean overnight. So fresh was the day that even the grubby, decaying farm outside of Lynwood looked more picturesque than sordid.

Michael Shayne steered his car into the littered front yard before the old house and parked. Nobody seemed to be around.

Shayne swung out of the car and long-legged it up to the front door and into the rank-smelling house. He circled the staircase and pushed cautiously into the room where yesterday he had questioned Joe Jardine.

The room was empty. Empty of people, anyway. Trash still littered the floor and the sagging cot. The smell of unwashed bodies soured the air.

Jardine's amateurish sketches were gone.

Leaving the deserted room, Shayne stalked back up the hall to the front door.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Anybody home?"

A soft voice answered from above, "Who are you? The fuzz?"

Shayne directed his gaze up the stairway and a girl coming down it. Her hair was regulation long and straight and uncombed. Her jeans were faded to an uneven blue, chopped off at the knees. Above the waist she was naked.

"I'm looking for Joe Jardine. No, I'm not the fuzz."

The girl continued on down the stairs, her eyes boldly appraising. "My name's Kitty. Won't I do as well as Joe?"

She came to a stop two steps from the bottom, which brought her eyes almost to a level with Shayne's. She held her shoulders back, thrusting her small breasts forward.

"You can cover up, kid," Shayne said. "I've seen it all too many times before."

The girl flinched as though he had struck her. She raised her bare arms and crossed them protectively in front of her.

"Man, are you ever square!" she said.

"Sure. Where's Jardine?" Shayne asked.

"Him and Zelda split real late last night."

"Where to?"

"Man, how should I know? Why should I care? People come, people go. Who keeps track?"

The girl called Kitty broke into a loose, disconnected kind of laugh. Shayne realized it would be a waste of time trying to talk sense to her. He turned on his heel to leave and found himself staring into the bearded face of the youth in fatigues he had talked to yesterday.

"Is Super Snooper bugging you, Kitty?"

"Yeah, man." Kitty giggled. "He told me to cover up."

For the first time Shayne saw that the youth was holding the broken handle of a hoe or some other garden implement. The bearded one raised it menacingly, and Shayne's lips drew back in the wolfish grin that many men had cause to remember with sorrow.

"Sonny boy," he said tightly, "I get the definite impression that you're threatening me with that stick. I'll give you two seconds to change your mind about that."

With a snarl the young man lunged, brandishing the broken handle clumsily over his head. Shayne feinted a backward move, then stepped into the charging youth, using his left

forearm to ward off the descending hoe handle. He fastened the fingers of his right hand around the boy's neck and slammed him against the wall. Shayne kept enough pressure on the other's throat so only a little air could get through.

The bearded one rolled his eyes and thrashed wildly, all to no avail. A number of his friends, attracted by the shuffle, had drifted out into the hallway, but they all kept a respectful distance.

Shayne eased the pressure slightly and asked, "Where's Jardine?"

"I don't know. I don't know, I tell you!"

Shayne squeezed once more until the youth's eyes began to roll back, then he relaxed the pressure again.

"Once more, sonny boy," the redhead said. "I've got no more time for games. Where's Jardine and Zelda?"

The young man gasped avidly for air.

"Sugarloaf Key," he managed. "I heard him say Sugarloaf Key and Paradise. That's all. Honest!"

Shayne loosened his grip, and the youth slid to a sitting position with his back against the wall, rubbing his bruised neck. The big redhead let his hard glance shuttle around the faces of the watching youths.

They all looked away and made no move toward him.

With a tight grin Shayne spun on his heel and strode out.

X

MIKE SHAYNE wasted no time getting back to Miami. He was in his office by noon.

Lucy Hamilton looked up from her typewriter and smiled. "Nice of you to drop in every day or so, Michael, to see how the business is going."

The redhead sailed his panama in the general direction of the hook. "You know the place is twice as efficient, Lucy, without me underfoot," he said with a grin. "Check our directory of the Keys, will you, Angel? See if you can find anything on Sugarloaf called Paradise."

"Sounds like something right out of Disney World."

"If my hunch is any way close to right, it's a whole lot less fun, believe me. I've got a fast phone call to make. Let me know what you turn up."

At his own desk Shayne picked up the phone and dialed Will Gentry's number.

"Oh, it's you, Mike." Gentry's voice sound more harried than usual. "What do you want?"

"I thought I should tell you, Will. I have a strong hunch on-

how to wrap up both the Bianchi killing and the kidnaping of Angela Drago."

Gentry said wearily, "Did you say hunch? Mike? We have every available man out tracking down legitimate leads, and you come to me with a hunch? When you have proof, evidence, something tangible, then call me and maybe we can spare some time to follow it up."

Shayne's bristly red eyebrows pulled together in a scowl, but he kept a rein on his temper. With Will Gentry already in a bad humor, now wasn't the time to get into a hassle with him.

He said, "All right, Will. We'll play it your way. But stay close to a phone."

Shayne hung up before Gentry could get in an angry retort.

"I have the information you wanted on Sugarloaf Key, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said from the doorway.

"Fine, Angel. Who or what is Paradise?"

"You have several choices. On Sugarloaf Key there is a Paradise Laundromat, a Paradise Miniature Golf Course, and a Paradise Trailer Park. Is that any help?"

Shayne tugged thoughtfully at an earlobe for a moment, then grinned slowly. "I don't think the people I want will be

doing laundry or playing minature golf. So that leaves the Paradise Trailer Park." He got to his feet. "I'll see you later, Angel."

The drive down U.S. 1, where the Florida Keys are strung like green jewels on a long necklace showcased against the ocean's blue, was ordinarily a pleasant one, but Mike Shayne's thoughts were not on pleasant things.

As he headed for Sugarloaf Key, he mentally ticked off the points that had brought him this far. There was Chips Bianchi's unexplained visit to Lynwood, the girl's locket in his desk drawer and the tuft of blonde hair, the attack on Shayne when he delivered the ransom money, and a chance remark last night from young Teddy Bianchi.

Shayne was sure the final answer was only a few miles ahead of him now, and he also had the gloomy feeling that it wasn't going to make anybody particularly happy.

Sugarloaf Key was the last one large enough for significant habitation before Key West at the end of the long string. The Paradise Trailer Park wasn't hard to find. Like everything else on the key, it was easily visible from the highway.

The wheeled dwellings in the Paradise were not the elaborate,

semi-permanent structures that go under the name of mobile homes. The ones parked here were real trailers that looked like they would be capable of actual travel should a car be hooked up to them. Some, with license plates mostly from the Middle West, obviously had traveled. Others were shiny new and seemed quite comfortable where they rested here in Paradise.

One of the newer trailers had a sign on the door: *A. Thomas, Manager.* Shayne parked in front of it, strode up the short walk and banged on the door. It had an insubstantial feeling under the drumming of his knuckles.

The door opened and a man with a roughened skin and a smile like a split melon greeted Shayne.

"Howdy, friend, and welcome to Paradise. What can I do for you?"

Shayne introduced himself. "I'm looking for a young couple in their twenties. The man's a little under six feet, long hair, beard. The girl is about five-four, short black hair, usually wears big sun glasses. His name is Joe Jardine, but they may have used another one. They would have arrived late last night, or sometime this morning."

"Sure, the Jardines," the

man answered readily. "Came in around eight this morning. Nice young couple. A little different life style than I'm used to maybe, but a guy's got to be broad minded these days, keep up with the times, right?" He gave Shayne an elaborate wink. "Especially when they pay cash on the spot for a brand new trailer, right?"

"They paid cash?"

"Sure did. Young fella said they got lucky and won a bundle at Hialeah. Maybe they did and maybe they didn't. It's really none of my business, right?"

"Are they here now?"

"Sure are. Right down that row of trailers behind you. Theirs is Number Eight. Brand new."

"Thanks."

Shayne crunched over the coral-strewn roadway between the trailers until he reached Number Eight, a cream-colored job with simulated wood trim. Outside the other trailers people, most of them elderly, sat in lawn chairs reading or chatting, soaking up the sun.

Trailer Number Eight was closed up tight, curtains drawn across the windows. Shayne hammered on the door. He kept it up until it finally opened a few inches, and a bearded face peered out of the gloomy interior.

"Hello, Jardine. Remember me?"

Jardine tried to close the metal door, but Shayne stiff-armed it wide, propelling the young man back with it.

The interior of the new trailer had already begun to take on the slovenly look of Jardine's room at the hippie colony outside of Lynwood. Clothing and food wrappers were left on the floor where they fell. The fold-out bed was unmade. The air was rank with stale smoke and sweat.

Zelda, wearing a long, shapeless granny dress, moved back against the far wall and watched Shayne warily through her big sun glasses.

"Hey, man, what do you think you're doing?" Jardine's protest lacked force.

"Sit down," Shayne ordered. "You, too," he added, jerking a thumb at the girl.

When they were seated, Shayne took up a position in front of them. "I hear you paid cash on the line for this trailer. A big killing at Hialeah, you told the manager. You know something, Jardine? I don't think that's the way it was."

"You've got no right to come busting in here like this," Jardine began.

"Shut up, Joe," the girl snapped. "Let him spit it all out."

"That's what I intend doing," Shayne said. "The money you used to buy this trailer was part of the ransom Nick Drago put together to buy back his daughter. The money that was taken out of my car after you knocked me out last night in Homestead Bayfront Park. The reason you clubbed me, you were afraid I'd recognize you. Otherwise, you would have let me just hand over the money, which is what I was there for in the first place."

"You can't prove any of this," the girl said in a low voice.

"Oh, I think I can. It was the sight of a blonde girl in my headlights last night that brought me charging out of the car. The girl was you, Zelda, in a blonde wig. You looked remarkably like Angela Drago." He paused, staring hard at her. "Which is not so surprising, since you are Angela Drago."

"Man, you're out of your head!" Jardine said.

"Let it go, Joe," the girl said. "It will be easy enough for him to check now. I'm curious to know how you figured it all out, Shayne."

"Your disguise was pretty good," Shayne said. "With your hair chopped short and dyed black, big dark glasses to hide your eyes, and in baggy clothes, you looked nothing like Angela

Drago. It was so good, in fact, that I didn't tumble to the fact that you knew something about Nick Drago's past nobody else in Lynwood knew, something only his daughter knew. It was a chance remark somebody made to me last night that tipped me off. He said this is the age of hair. And for people in your culture that is certainly true. Nobody, male or female, wears short hair. In cutting off your long blonde hair to look less like Angela, you were actually calling attention to yourself."

Several seconds ticked past and nobody spoke or moved. Then with a brittle laugh the girl jerked off the sunglasses, revealing the bright blue eyes of the photograph Drago had provided.

"Not bad," she said. "It almost worked. It was the only way I could be with Joe. And not be poor, I mean. I don't much dig the establishment, but being poor is a-real drag. When I was seeing Joe last fall my father—my sanctimonious ex-tough of a father—found out and really chewed me out. He said if I didn't break it off he'd pull me out of school and see that I never had an extra dime of his money. Imagine a man making all his bread selling hamburgers thinking he's better than an artist like Joe here just

because Joe has a different set of values."

"Joe's 'different' values don't seem to exclude faking a kidnaping," Shayne said dryly.

"It was the only thing we could do, don't you see?" Angela said. "We planned it for months, meeting secretly so even my straight-arrow roommate wouldn't get suspicious. Then Sunday I simply walked out and went to Joe's place. There we cut my hair and dyed it, burned my clothes, and I became Zelda. Nobody asked any questions because people at the farm don't ask questions."

"You don't seem very concerned, I'll say that for you," Shayne said.

"Are you kidding? Why should we be? So we blew it, and we'll have to give the money back. Don't kid yourself that my father will bring charges against his little girl. Oh, he'll be steamed off for a while, but he's not going to see his darling daughter go to prison. And if he won't testify against me, then there's no case against Joe, either," she finished triumphantly.

"You may be right about that," Shayne agreed, "but your father can't do a thing in the world to save you from a murder charge."

"Murder! What murder?" Jardine's surprise seemed genu-

ine. "What are you talking about, man?"

"The murder of Chips Bianchi. When Drago accused him of the kidnaping, Bianchi was afraid he'd be tagged with it. So he took it on himself to do some investigating. While I was busy with the first try at delivering the ransom, Bianchi went to Lynwood to see what he could find out. Angela's roommate sent him out to the hippie colony.

"You two weren't there because you were in Miami to pick up the ransom. You spotted Drew Kellogg following me and got scared off. Going through your room at the farmhouse, Bianchi found the locket and some clippings of blonde hair. He took them with him.

"He figured out what was going on, but didn't say anything, since it was to his advantage to have Drago pay the ransom and strap himself financially. But if it came the point where he had to clear himself of the kidnaping, I'm sure he wouldn't have hesitated to blow the whistle on you. My guess is he somehow got word to you that he was holding the locket and the hair."

"He left a message at the farmhouse," Angela said, her mouth a grimace of disgust. "He and my father were two of

a kind. Scum. Bianchi wanted me to be sure it didn't look like he was involved, he said. But I couldn't take a chance on a man like that holding something over my head."

Jardine stared at the girl in shock. "What are you saying, Angie?"

"I'm saying I arranged for there to be one less big shot like Bianchi in the world. Sooner or later he would have come down on us, Joe. If you had come to Bianchi's house five minutes later, Shayne, I would have found the locket and the hair and you'd have no evidence, nothing. We made a big mistake not killing you out there in the park."

Jardine jumped up from the bed in agitation and backed off a couple of steps.

"You didn't tell me you killed anyone," he said in a shaking voice. "Fakeing a kidnaping is one thing, murder is something else. I don't want any part of this!"

Jardine began to sidle sideways like a crab and stepped directly in front of Shayne. Angela used the opportunity to ram her hand under the pillow for a revolver.

In the few seconds it took the detective to shove Jardine out of the way, she had the revolver pointed at him held in both hands.

"There was no other way, Joe," she said. "I know men like Chips Bianchi, like I know my father. We could never have been easy as long as he knew the truth. Now all we have to do is take care of Mike Shayne and we can fly free like a big bird."

"No, Angie! I won't go along with killing."

Jardine started toward the bed, reaching for the gun, and she pulled the trigger. The sound of a shot boomed like a cannon in the small confines of the trailer. Jardine cried out, clutched at his shoulder, and staggered away.

Shayne lunged forward, his fingers clamping around the girl's wrist. She got off one more shot that plunked harmlessly into the ceiling before Shayne could wrestle the revolver away from her. He stepped back. Angela had doubled up on the bed, weeping softly, and Joe Jardine stood to one side, clutching his shoulder, his face white and drawn.

At the sound of running footsteps outside, Shayne open-

ed the door. The trailer park manager was running toward the trailer, his face caught in a grimace of alarm.

"You'd better call for an ambulance," Shayne called to him, "and the police. I'm afraid you've lost a couple of tenants."

An hour later Michael Shayne was on his way back to Miami. The case was finished, but he experienced no feeling of satisfaction.

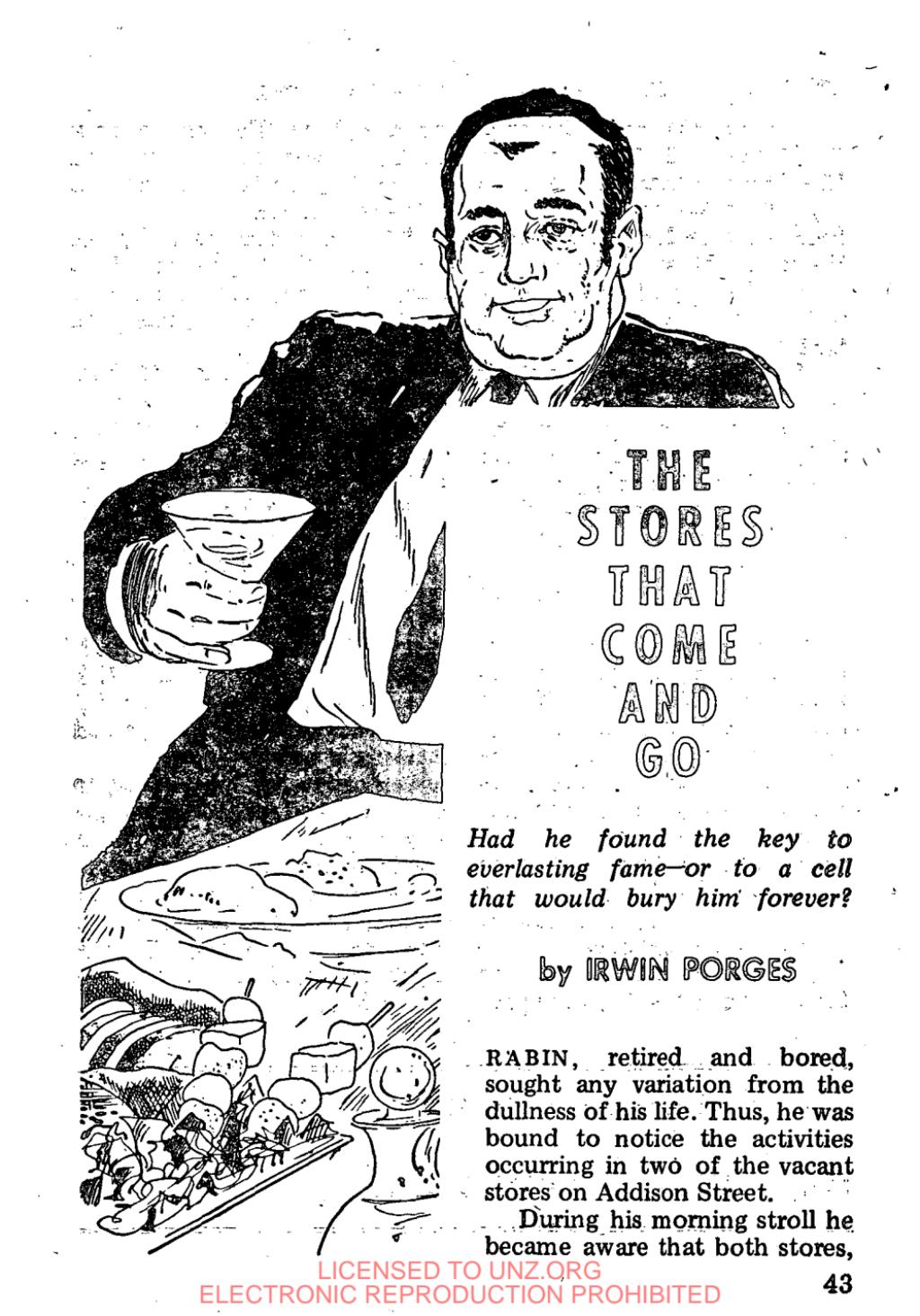
He could report to Nick Drago that his daughter had been found, and most of the ransom money recovered. It had still been in the satchel, shoved far back under the bed. Shayne doubted that Nick Drago was going to be grateful to him for the way things had turned out.

But that, Mike Shayne reflected with a sigh, was the way things went sometimes in the detecting business.

He stuck a cigarette in his mouth, fired it, and drove on into the darkening Florida night, the wind off the sea cool on his face.

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THE STORES THAT COME AND GO

Had he found the key to everlasting fame—or to a cell that would bury him forever?

by IRWIN PORGES

RABIN, retired and bored, sought any variation from the dullness of his life. Thus, he was bound to notice the activities occurring in two of the vacant stores on Addison Street.

During his morning stroll he became aware that both stores,

one in the middle of the block and the other at the end, had evidently been rented. The windows were covered by hanging cloths, but at the exposed edges he could detect people moving about.

His evening walk with his wife Celia brought him eagerly back to the stores, where he was disappointed to see that the windows remained covered. Rabin and his wife, who had lived in their small apartment for five years, knew the neighborhood by heart. On Addison Street they had watched a stream of small businesses open and close. A beauty shop, shoe repair place, liquor or camera store and various others, all launched in hope, they all failed to attract customers and soon vanished from the scene.

His natural pessimism aggravated by increasing years, Rabin repeated his sour comment about the little man who had no chance in the business world today.

"Failure," he predicted gloomily. "What else can they expect?"

Celia scolded him often for his negative attitude. "How can you say that?" she asked. "You don't even know what kind of business is opening."

"It makes no difference." On this matter his opinion was very positive. "I've told you

before. People won't buy in small stores. They go to supermarkets, department stores. The little man can't compete today. The day of the little man—"

"I know, I know. You always expect the worst." His delight was to triumph over her in an argument, but now she was in no mood for bickering. She tried to mollify him, laughing and patting his arm. "I think you're a jinx. You give these stores bad luck."

Several days later the mystery of the two businesses was resolved. The one in the middle of the block, incredibly to Rabin, would be something called *The Mod Barber* and would offer hair shaping, regularly five dollars, at a special opening price of three-fifty. The other store, at the end of the block, was announced as a men's clothing and haberdashery store, featuring the latest styles.

These choices, to Rabin, indicated an aberration or an instinct for suicide.

"In this neighborhood?" he told his wife. "Who needs them? Failure is certain. Mark my words—"

"All right," she said. "Sit like a vulture and wait for them to die."

"You'll find out," he promised.

In the coming weeks the prospect of proving her wrong would give him a new energy and interest.

SEVERAL evenings in the week Joseph Miller and his girl friend Jacqueline also liked to walk down Addison Street. She would move slowly from window to window, and Miller, who did not indulge in light conversation, stood by while she inspected the jewelry or furniture or other items that were on display. After meeting her some weeks before in a small restaurant where he occasionally ate, he had been pleased to discover that her apartment was only a block away from his.

Miller, a heavy man in his fifties, had a brownish skin, deep black eyes and black curly hair, and the combination gave him a Latin appearance. His hair, in need of cutting, dangled unevenly in the back. A ragged beard, carelessly trimmed, joined with a thick mustache and wide sideburns.

Jacqueline, some fifteen years younger, from the first had countered his somber attitude by adopting a light, joking manner. This seemed the best way to overcome his moodiness. She knew he found her attractive, possibly because of her contrast to his darkness;

she had long blonde hair, and her taste ran to brightly colored dresses and suits. Quite perceptive, she was aware of his occasional admiring glance and the flicker of approval in his eyes.

The changes in the vacant stores went unnoticed by Miller; he was hardly a man to be interested in matters of this type. But on an evening walk, Jacqueline was at once drawn to the window where colored signs and posters heralded the coming barber shop.

"Hair shaping," she read aloud, glancing at him amusedly. "Very modern."

He understood the smile that curved her lips; she had chided him several times for not doing something about his ragged hair and beard. He had responded with indifference. Now he shrugged, reflecting that women somehow were entertained by all these trivial happenings.

"Small stores," he said. "They always come and go."

Her gaze became serious. "They are little people, struggling for an existence."

He thought he sensed disappointment in her face. Her past comments had revealed a strong idealism. Uncomfortable at having said the wrong thing, he hurried to speak. "Of course I sympathize with them. Life can be very tough."

She looked at the window and then turned to him with a teasing expression. "When they open, perhaps you might have your hair and beard trimmed, just a little?"

He answered impatiently. "I like it the way it is: Why should I bother?"

Her smile was tolerant, as though he were acting like a small boy, but she said nothing. He needed no reminder that she would be pleased if he had his hair trimmed. The thought made him resentful; it was the old story, women trying to change men, to improve them according to some feminine standard. But the fault was his, because after ignoring women for a long time he had allowed a sudden loneliness, really quite temporary, to affect him. In the restaurant the quick glances of a young woman had caused him to respond emotionally. For a moment he stood stiff with annoyance, but when she took his arm and resumed the walk, he relaxed.

On succeeding days, as he walked alone down Addison Street, he paused briefly at the two stores. In the barber shop the chairs were installed, the painters finished. The place would soon open for business. The store at the end of the street displayed a large banner with red letters, proclaiming,

MEN'S FASHION CENTER... COMING SOON.

Some days later both stores opened, and in the early evening, when Miller accompanied Jacqueline, a young man whose long hair was carefully shaped in the modern style, bent over a customer in the chair. He turned to smile at the two and wave.

"Friendly, isn't he?" said Jacqueline. She seemed to enjoy waving back.

Miller grunted. "Looking for business."

She teased him again. "I guess he was thinking *here's a likely prospect.*"

"Unlikely," he corrected. It was typical of women to repeat themselves. "Even if I do have my hair cut," he said, "why should I go to this place? Mod. What do I care about Mod?"

She pressed his arm. "What's the expression they use? Square?" She laughed. "Aren't you afraid people will call you an old square?"

He attempted to fall in with her joke, offering a faint smile, but he suddenly demanded, "Why do women always try to remake men?"

She appeared hurt by his question. "Remake? I hadn't thought of it that way. Maybe they only bother when they like a man."

He said nothing further, but

on several occasions, when he passed the shop and the young barber waved at him, he was tempted to go in. Finally, on Friday he yielded to the impulse. He would see Jacqueline on Sunday, and the idea came that he might please and surprise her by turning up with his hair and beard trimmed. He entered the store expecting to be seated at one of the chairs he had seen from the street, but instead the barber took his arm and began to usher him into a partitioned room in the back. Miller yanked his arm loose and drew away abruptly. He turned to gaze about the store, his body tense.

"What's this?" he asked, his voice loud and gruff. "Why should I sit there?"

The barber, after staring puzzledly, explained that the room was designed for clients who wanted personalized hair shaping. He became confidential with Miller. "You see there are men, mainly older men, who don't care about styling and don't wear beards. To them, well, a haircut is just a haircut. But you're different, as I can see, with that full black beard."

The compliment seemed too contrived for Miller, but he felt that it really didn't matter as long as he was in the shop. He slid into the chair, and when



the barber raised his scissors, Miller quickly cautioned him. "Remember, I want a light trim, just a little around the edges. You mustn't take off too much."

"Exactly," said the barber. "Shaping the hair. Nothing drastic."

"On the beard," Miller instructed, "just a few touches. Enough to even it."

The barber nodded and murmured. Miller sat with his body tilted forward, like a man ready to leave the chair momentarily. The barber trimmed the hair in the back, shortening it, and then proceeded to take a little off the top. After working on the sideburns briefly, he began to trim the

beard. At this point Miller became quite rigid. When the barber combed out the thick hairs on his chin and below, Miller made grumbling noises.

"You don't have to bother with that," he said. "Just get the ragged edges around the sides."

"It should be balanced, symmetrical." The barber was combing the beard at the chin and snipping away lightly. "This lower part is really too heavy."

"All right, all right." Miller pulled his head back. "Haven't you cut enough?"

"Just a little more," the barber said. "Then I'll have it even."

Miller submitted grudgingly as the scissors and comb moved through his beard. In a few moments he felt the chair turning, and now he could see his face in the mirror.

The barber beamed behind him. "How do you like it?"

Inspecting himself, Miller could see at once that the ragged effect had vanished. Also, without shortening the beard too much the barber had definitely improved his appearance. Miller nodded. "It looks good."

"It's modern styling." The barber appeared proud of his work. "Makes you look younger. People don't realize. A wild,

ragged beard adds years to a man."

Although Miller viewed this as a kind of clumsy flattery, he still agreed with the barber. He did look younger and he was pleased at the thought of Jacqueline and how surprised she would be. On Sunday afternoon, when they met, he said nothing, but he at once caught the delighted glow in her eyes.

"You did it!" she exclaimed. "You had it trimmed." She made quite a fuss over him, turning him around so that she could see the back of his head. "You're a new man," she said, and then smiling into his face, "Well it wasn't such an ordeal, was it?"

He was pleased but somewhat wary. Once a woman started with a man there was no telling where she would stop. When they had gazed into the window of the new clothing store, he had been aware of her hints. Clothes were of very little concern to him. In the evenings he wore what he considered to be his "good" suit; it was really quite old. The pockets of the jacket and pants were stretched and baggy, as though they had been used to carry heavy objects. He cared nothing about styles, and Jacqueline's remark that the men today were wearing light colors and lively,

daring patterns, left him unimpressed.

On this Sunday when they came to the clothing store, he at first waited on one side while Jacqueline examined the clothes in the window. But she called to him, insisting that he look at a suit in a light brown with a neat, checked pattern; he had to admit that it was not too extreme. Something like this, she pointed out, would be a happy medium, just right for him.

A little annoyed, Miller reflected that it was all quite obvious. She had begun with the haircut and now the hints about clothes. Next, he supposed, if he gave in to this, he'd have to buy new shoes and then probably shirts. He answered grumpily and moved on, so that she was forced to follow him.

In the passing days his resistance continued, and in fact brought them almost to the first quarrel they ever had. She had taken to pouting. Her attitude now seemed to be that if he really cared, he would do this to please her. Miller became uncertain. He told himself with disgust that he deserved this, had created it himself by allowing his romantic notions to overcome his common sense. From a man who had avoided entanglements with women he had deteriorated into one who

submitted to being led about by the nose.

Naturally, he could break up with her and return to his former condition. But then he had been quite lonely. And he had to concede that he enjoyed Jacqueline; he was an over serious man, a stodgy man, and he needed her youth and spontaneity to coax him out of his gloomy moods.

This troublesome period, when he felt that even the minor tension between Jacqueline and him was adding to his problems, became further complicated. There was a day when, walking alone, he was seized by a sudden apprehension. A quick backward glance revealed a man sauntering behind him. Even in that second he found something familiar in the face or posture; certainly he had seen the man before. And why should the man slow up when he did?

Miller turned into the doorway of a store, pretending to stare at the display. The man walked by, somehow too oblivious, too casual. Later, a block away, Miller had a sense of again being followed. Yet, when the man passed, his appearance was different. Miller lashed himself with contempt, ashamed of his foolishness and his tendency to create phantoms.

He and Jacqueline, as though by common agreement, had avoided the stores for several days, but on one of their evening walks, Miller, apparently without intention, guided her down Addison Street. At the clothing store an elderly gray-haired man stood inside near the window, and seeing them, nodded and bowed courteously.

Aware of Jacqueline's surprised glance, Miller, groping awkwardly for the words, said, "I was thinking, maybe I could use a new suit."

She was silent, her expression oddly solemn. To him she seemed momentarily tired, drained of energy.

"You're sure?" Jacqueline asked. "That's what you really want?"

"Yes, yes." Now impatient and resentful, he wanted to get it over. "I need a suit. Let's go in."

The gray-haired man, too effusive for Miller's taste, spoke of the fine collection of modern clothes, but actually, the stock appeared very limited. Viewing the one long rack of suits, Miller reflected that he was mistaken in coming here; he might better have gone to a large department store. He glared at Jacqueline and started toward the rack. The man followed, flourishing a tape-measure.

"Sizes," he said. "The jacket and pants."

Miller stared. "Is this necessary?"

"You must be fitted with the right size," said Jacqueline.

The man moved nearer, his hand extended. "If you would take off your jacket—"

Miller drew away. "Never mind that. Just measure the coat I'm wearing. That's close enough." When the man stood uncertainly, Miller said, "Well, what are you waiting for? Go ahead. And I can tell you my waist, it's thirty-eight. Don't bother measuring."

The man applied the tape-measure to the sleeves and back while Miller grunted and shifted about. With this finished, Miller turned to examining the suits; quick glimpses were sufficient to confirm the opinion he had already formed—the colors and patterns were too loud and wild. He viewed Jacqueline's choices with disfavor, muttering, "Not for me."

Finally, like a man realizing that an unpleasant task must be ended, he announced in disgust, "All right, I'll take this one." The suit, a compromise, was a medium brown with a quiet pin stripe.

"Very good, very good," said the man, taking the suit off the hanger. "There's a dressing

room in the back; let me show you."

"Dressing room?" Miller's voice rose in irritation. "What do you mean? You know my size." When the man, surprised, began, "Really, a suit must be tried on," Miller interrupted loudly, "I told you I'll take it. That's all."

"Alterations," said the man. He was gazing in bewilderment at Jacqueline. "A suit usually has alterations. And the pants have no cuffs. We must find the length."

Jacqueline touched Miller's arm and smiled. "He's right. Everybody tries a suit on. You can't take it just as it is."

Miller looked about frustratedly, like a man faced with an impossible decision. One foolish thing leads to another, he reminded himself.

He shrugged. "All right. Let's get this over with." He permitted the man to lead him to a small dressing room. There he removed his clothes, carefully hanging up the jacket first and covering it with the pants. Then he slipped into the new suit. He stepped outside and called impatiently, "Well? What now?"

"Over here," the man answered. "There's a large mirror."

Miller followed to a corner of the store and waited before

the mirror, hardly bothering to glance at himself. When he did look, he could see Jacqueline standing some distance away. At that moment he became aware of rustling sounds and voices in half whispers. He turned in alarm, but someone had appeared suddenly to pinion his arms in the back, while a tall, powerful man gripped him in the front.

As Miller went into a spasm of struggling, his first instinct was to wrench his arms loose and reach inside his jacket. But the new cloth floated before his eyes, and he realized that the effort was futile.

Another man came from the back, dangling Miller's suit in one hand and waving the revolver in the other. The man grinned. "He had this in the inside pocket." He hurled the suit and it fell to the floor with a heavy thump. "Guess what's in his pants, a nice, long switchblade knife."

The tall man nodded grimly. "Our friend would be very efficient with that." He tightened his grasp, thrusting his face toward Miller. "You remember me; I am Juan Moreno. I'm sure you do. I can see it in your eyes. You have reason to, eh?" Miller made no attempt to resist as the man behind him tied his wrists with a thick cord.

Moreno inspected him with

satisfaction. "Ah, we knew what we were up against, didn't we?" he said. "A gun and a knife. If we had tried to capture you on the street, there would have been shooting. And that would have brought the American police—an intrusion we couldn't afford." His voice rose thin in mockery. "There might have been a bloody mess, with something serious happening to you. We wouldn't want that, would we?"

Miller hung limp in the arms of the two men. His blurred eyes focused for a moment on the mirror where in the background Jacqueline's face, somber, all life gone, stared at him. His gaze flashed a moment's accusation and then turned indifferent.

"How could you tell?" he asked Moreno. "How?"

"We suspected but had to be sure." Moreno stood back. "You are really buried in that beard. The barber found the old scar on your chin, and we had people photographing you while you sat in the chair. It was easy to picture you without the beard." He straightened and cleared his throat like a man about to make an announcement. "I address you now by your real name, Antonio Lopez. The people of your country have indicted you. As a dictator you betrayed, tortured and

murdered. Your hands are stained with the blood of many innocent victims."

Contempt darkened Miller's face. "Spare me your speeches. They mean nothing to me."

"Nearby a plane is awaiting," Moreno said, sternly. "You are to be returned to stand trial."

Miller twisted furiously. "You have no right," he cried. "You forget this is another country. I have found sanctuary here."

Moreno burst into a laugh. "Sanctuary? You who have entered illegally? And under an assumed name?"

Despair touched Miller's face, but in a moment, as though acquiring a fresh confidence, he spoke defiantly. "Very well? Let my countrymen judge. They remember what I have done for them in the past. The little people will rise up in my support when I return. They realize that my thoughts were always for them."

"Oh, yes," said Moreno scornfully. "The little people are eager to greet you again. They recall how you *thought* of them. When you did, it was to throw them into prison." He signalled the other man. "Enough. Gag him. The van is in the back."

They left, and only

Jacqueline and the elderly man remained. He quickly set to work transferring the clothes from the racks into large cardboard cartons. Jacqueline hastened out of the store and down the street to her apartment. When she arrived, she began at once to pack her few belongings. Little time was needed to gather several dresses and suits and to empty the drawers in a dresser. She must, of course, stop to notify the landlord; the rent had been paid to the end of the month, but if he complained, she would offer an extra amount.

Her packing completed, she went from room to room to make certain that nothing had been forgotten. At the end she stood before the large mirror gazing at herself. She fingered her blonde hair, grimaced, and parting it, disclosed the dark roots beneath. Rinsing out the dye would be like a rebirth, a return to a lost identity. The woman of her country took pride in their thick black hair. She sighed, gripped her suitcase, and without a backward glance left the apartment.

On his morning walk Rabin made the astonishing discovery. Fixtures, clothing, barber chairs, all had been there the day before, and all had vanished overnight. Two empty stores yawned before his unbelieving

eyes. The owners had not even posted the usual going-out-of-business signs. Rabin hurried home and rushed into his apartment to report the stunning occurrence to Celia.

She responded with amusement rather than surprise. "Like Arabs folding their tents," she said.

Rabin was not to be fooled by this casual attitude. She was of course pretending the matter was trivial, her devious way to avoid admitting she had been wrong. But Rabin had waited many days for his moment of triumph.

"It was foolish from the start," he said. "Didn't I tell you so? A mod clothing store, a barber shop—there was never a chance. I told you but you wouldn't listen. The little man—"

She mimicked his familiar remark. "The day of the little man is gone. You forget one thing about him: he has courage. Again and again he will try. Then one day a store will not close. The little man will succeed."

Rabin, taken aback at this philosophy which he had never heard before, stared at his wife. He turned to walk away, grumbling bitterly. Without understanding how she had done it, he felt that his victory had been snatched from

Death on the Beach

by DAN ROSS

A day of strange, dark terror.

A night when murder wore velvet...



MR. MEI WONG, proprietor of the Bombay Art and Curio Studio, had never felt more relaxed in his seventy-six years. The plump Chinese owner of the great Indian city's most celebrated treasure shop was enjoying one of his few holidays. To make it a truly memorable one nothing of event had happened and he had only one more day to go before leaving California to return to New York on business.

A wealthy client, Major Timothy Sterling, had invited him as one of several guests to spend a holiday at his beach house located directly on the Pacific, a short distance from Los Angeles.

Now the Panama-hatted Mei

Wong sat in a deck chair on the rear veranda of the house. He wore his usual immaculate white-linen suit and his pudgy hands held a pair of binoculars with which he scanned the long stretch of white beach. He was happy and content and about to put away the strong glasses and join his host for an afternoon gin and tonic when he caught a familiar figure walking near the ocean some distance away.

It was Matthew Trent, another guest of the Major's. Trent, with his wife Julia, was currently making an independent motion picture. In happier days the tall, balding man had been a famous Hollywood director but lately Mei Wong had

Featuring

MR. MEI WONG



heard that little work had come his way. He was now engaged in this personally-financed effort to make a comeback. Julia, his third wife, had only been mar-

ried to him a few years and he was starring her in a film about Americans in the Orient.

Trent wore blue bathing trunks and walked with bent

head as Mei Wong followed him with the binoculars. He appeared to be a man deep in troubled thought, the old art dealer thought. Then a new figure came into view and although her back was to Mei Wong he had no trouble recognizing her from the bright yellow cape she was wearing over her bathing suit. The cape matched a kerchief of yellow that covered her hair. Mei Wong followed the two. The woman was easily identifiable because of the yellow cape, for only Julia Trent had one of this color. He watched as the film director's wife came close to him.

But he was not prepared for what happened next. Very deliberately she pulled out something from inside the cape, something that glistened in the bright sun. A deadly glistening. There was a loud report and then the woman dropped the gun as Trent slumped on the sand, a hand stretched out into the lapping waves. She then ran off and sought concealment in a cluster of bushes a few hundred feet up from the beach before Mei Wong put down the binoculars and began to hurriedly make his way along the white sands to the spot where the film director's body lay motionless.

His broad face wore an expression of sadness as he strug-

gled across the beach, a hand clutching his Panama hat to prevent his losing it in the slight breeze. He was unhappy because this distasteful thing had happened here among his friends and because he had seen so much of life's dark side. And he recalled a remark of his friend Bannerjee of the Bombay Homicide Division. Inspector Bannerjee wryly remarked Wong's holidays nearly always included a murder. It was close to the truth and he frowned to think that this one had been ruined.

As he came up beside the body of Matthew Trent one glance told him there was nothing he could do. He removed his hat and stood there staring down at the murdered man for a moment. As far as he knew the Trents had been happy. But it was hard to tell about these people in the International Set. They often put up a front that told little about their true relationship.

He recalled another guest at the beach house was Peter Shaw, a young English actor, who had also been working in Trent's film and who knew Julia from her London days. He had an idea Julia Trent and the handsome young actor might have been very close at one time. Close enough to provide a motive for murder?

Wong wondered about this as he made his way up the beach toward the bushes where Julia Trent had sought concealment and vanished. She must have been waiting somewhere in the bushes until her husband came to that deserted section of the private beach area. An ideal spot for murder. Apparently she had not realized she might be so clearly seen from the beach house and certainly she hadn't thought of anyone being there studying the beach with binoculars.

Mei Wong sighed as he looked around and saw no one. He had not seen Julia Trent's face. She had been careful to keep her back to the house during all the time she'd been on the beach. The old Chinaman was breathing heavily as he moved about in the rough growth of shrubs and bushes. Then he uttered a small cry of satisfaction as he came upon a cluster of cigarette ends marked with lipstick. Taking out a linen handkerchief, he carefully scooped them up and placed the handkerchief in a side pocket. Then he returned to the beach house to raise the alarm and see that the police were informed.

Major Sterling was in his study reading when Mei Wong reached the house. The distinguished gray-haired man stood



MR. MEI WONG

up in shocked disbelief as he told him what had taken place.

"This is dreadful," he said, consternation showing on his tanned face. "I suppose the police must be called at once."

"Police? What are you two talking about?" It was Sterling's wife Mona who had entered the study to overhear them and was now standing facing them with her lovely face pale. She had also been a Hollywood actress until her marriage to the wealthy major and it was through her the several film people had come to be guests in the house.

Her husband quickly told her about the murder. With a forlorn glance in Mei Wong's direction he added, "Mr. Wong feels the police should be called in at once."

"I suppose so," Mona Sterling said sinking into a handy chair. "What a dreadful scandal there will be! Why would Julia want to do such a thing?"

Mei Wong's eyebrows raised. "We can hardly speculate at this time. Indeed, I cannot truthfully say that it was Julia Trent who shot her husband. I did not see her face at any time."

"But the yellow cape," the dark-haired Mona said. "It must have been her."

Major Sterling reached for the phone. "Mei Wong is right. This is a matter for Inspector Murdoch."

The tall, tanned Inspector Murdoch arrived in a police car. After he'd looked after the preliminaries and paid his respects to Mei Wong he began to ply the host of the beach party for information.

"What about the beach outfits of your other guests?" he wanted to know, a frown on his ascetic face. "Julia Trent wore a yellow cape identical to the one Mr. Wong saw on the murdereress and she is no longer in the house. Presumably she is guilty and has run off somewhere.

Still, I'd like to know what the other ladies here wore."

Major Sterling shrugged. "My wife has a crimson cape of the same style as Julia's. There is another young woman, Matthew Trent's secretary, Miss Madelon Myles. She has a purple cape to match her bathing suit," He paused to add, "I may say all the ladies' bathing suits match their capes."

Inspector Murdoch nodded impatiently. "I understand that."

Mei Wong turned to his friend. "I think we may eliminate Miss Myles from suspicion. She has been ill in her room all day, suffering from a stomach upset."

The inspector sighed. "It seems pretty obvious that for one reason or another Julia Trent murdered her husband."

"Almost too obvious," Mei Wong said quietly.

"Still I'm going to issue instructions to have a search begun for her and bring her in," the tall inspector said. "We've got to start with her."

He and Mei Wong were on their way to the main door of the beach house with Major Sterling and his wife with them when the door opened to reveal two figures in bathing suits, one was the English actor Peter Shaw, the other the missing Julia Trent. She looked dis-

traught and was wearing her yellow cape.

Peter Shaw stared at the inspector and the others assembled there and at once seemed aware of trouble.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

"Don't you know?" Inspector Murdoch asked harshly.

It was Major Sterling's wife Mona who stepped forward and with a sob said, "Surely you know! Matthew has been murdered!"

Julia Trent uttered a small cry of despair and covered her face with her hands as Peter Shaw put a protecting arm around her. The actor looked angry.

"What kind of a way is that to break the news to her?" he cried, helping her to a handy chair.

Inspector Murdoch eyed the two coldly. "I wonder if it's such a surprise to her, or you either, for that matter."

Peter Shaw stared at him in defiance. "What are you suggesting?"

"That Julia Trent may have killed her husband and you were involved," the inspector said. "Where have you two been?"

"Walking on the beach," Shaw said. "Julia was in an unhappy mood and I stayed with her to keep her company."

"We can check the details of that later," Inspector Murdoch said, and bringing out the gun he'd retrieved from the beach near the murdered man's body he held it out for Julia Trent to see.

"Is this your gun?" he asked.

Julia Trent looked as if she might collapse any minute. She shook her head. "No. I've never seen it before."

Murdoch stared at her. "Had there been any trouble between you and your husband?"

Peter Shaw turned to the upset young woman. "You don't have to answer that, Julia," he warned her.

Inspector Murdoch said, "Unless she has something to conceal it might be wise for her to be truthful in every detail. It often helps." And he waited for the widow of Matthew Trent to answer.

She hesitated, eyes cast down, and then in a low voice said, "We had a quarrel earlier this afternoon. That is why I went off by myself. I was very upset."

Inspector Murdoch exchanged a meaning glance with Mei Wong and then asked her, "What about?"

"Madelon Myles," she said in a near whisper.

"Your husband's secretary?" the inspector queried.

She nodded wearily. "I dis-



covered they had been having an affair. Matthew tried to deny it. I told him I had proof. I asked for my freedom. He became angry and said I was making it up because I wanted to marry Peter."

The blond young English actor winced at this mention of his name. Inspector Murdoch gave him a disgusted glance and then asked Julia Trent, "Was your husband right? Do you want to marry Peter Shaw?"

"I do," she admitted. "But that wasn't why I asked for a divorce. It was because of his cheating with Madelon I wanted

my freedom." Julia covered her face and began sobbing once more.

There was a moment of tense silence. Major Sterling and his wife, Mona, looked shocked. The inspector turned to Mei Wong and said quietly, "I'd say we have the motive for the crime."

"It seems Miss Myles is deeply involved although not present," Mei Wong said with a slight frown.

Peter Shaw spoke up now. "She couldn't have had anything to do with the murder. She's been in bed with some

sort of food poisoning all day. I saw her for a few minutes before I went out. She said Julia had come by to see her as well."

Inspector Murdoch turned to Mei Wong. "A good deal of our case rests on you, Mr. Wong. You say that you saw Julia Trent, wearing the same yellow cape she has on now, approach her husband and shoot him."

Mei Wong shook his head in protest. "Pardon me, Inspector. I did not say that exactly. I said the murder was done by someone in a yellow cape of the same size as Mrs. Trent. But I do not believe it was her."

It was the inspector's turn to show consternation. He stared at the stout old art collector.

"You're changing your story, it seems." He pointed to the cigarette butts on the table. "These cigarette ends you found on the beach are the same brand smoked by Julia Trent. The lipstick marks match her lipstick. I'd say we have sufficient circumstantial evidence to charge her."

"You will be making a mistake," Mei Wong assured him. "You overlook how easy it would be for someone to collect her cigarette butts from an ashtray in her room and take them to the beach. I suggest this was done by someone who wanted to see her husband

dead. Someone who planned to pin the crime on her."

"You're asking me to believe that?" Murdoch said. "You saw her do the crime. A woman wearing a yellow cape and she has the only yellow one in the place." He pointed to the unhappy Julia slumped in her chair with the cape still on her shoulders.

"It is a detail of the cape that just now caught my attention and convinced me she may be innocent," Mei Wong said calmly. And with a smile for Major Sterling he said, "Would you be kind enough to bring me the capes worn by the other two ladies in the house?"

Sterling hesitated a moment and then said, "Yes. Of course." He left to fetch the capes.

In the moment of waiting Mona Sterling turned to Mei Wong and said, "I'm not sure I understand what you have in mind, Mr. Wong. What do you hope to prove?"

"You'll find out in a moment," the old Chinese assured her with a small bow.

Inspector Murdoch offered him an exasperated look as Major Sterling returned with the two bathing capes over his arm. One was crimson and the other purple just as he had described them. He passed them to Mei Wong.

Mei Wong gave them a brief examination and then turned to the inspector. "I mentioned noticing a slight detail of Mrs. Trent's cape. It was that the pockets are on the outside. You will note this is also true of Mrs. Sterling's crimson cape and Madelon Myles' purple one." He paused, and then holding up the purple cape he said, "You will also see that the purple cape is lined with white." Next he put the purple cape over his arm and held up the crimson one. "While this," he said in a meaning tone, "is lined with yellow. In fact, the same shade of yellow as Julia Trent's cape. I suggest if it be worn in reverse it could easily deceive a distant onlooker, such as I was, into believing he was seeing Julia Trent's yellow cape."

Inspector Murdoch's eyes narrowed as he took the cape and turned to face Mona Sterling.

"What Mr. Wong says is true," he told her.

"I might not have thought of this possibility," Mei Wong went on, "had I not noticed the outside pockets. When the murderer reached for the gun she

let her hand slip inside the cape. Inside where the pocket would be when the crimson cape was worn in reverse."

Mona Sterling had taken a step backward.

"All right," she said in a hushed voice, "I did it. I admit it. I knew from the first I hadn't the nerve to get away with killing him. But I had to do it. He's been blackmailing me for years for something that happened long ago. I told him I couldn't get my husband to give me any more money. He threatened to expose me and—" the dark woman's voice broke and she began to sob as the major took her in his arms.

Mei Wong sighed.

"I am truly sorry," he said. "Blackmail is a despicable crime. No doubt the jury will take this into account when deciding on your fate, Mrs. Sterling." He glanced around at Inspector Murdoch. "Don't you agree, Inspector?"

The tall Inspector Murdoch simply shook his head in mock despair. "After the way you straightened me out in this I'm not sure that my opinions are worth noting."

COMING SOON: A NEW MR. WONG STORY by DAN ROSS

THE HUNCH

Somewhere in the sky a snatch victim was marked for death—unless I got there first.

by EDWIN P. HICKS



RETIRED Detective Joe Chaviski looked at the date, October 14, 1972, which he had encircled weeks before on the calendar. The Arkansas Razorbacks played the Baylor Bears at nearby

Fayetteville on that date. Tonight was October 13. He was going to the game and get in on his honorary police badge as he had done since his retirement.

He looked at his bedside clock. It was 10:30. He would start for the game a little after 11, take a box lunch, and eat it at the stadium. Right now he would have a big dish of vanilla ice cream and go to bed.

But Chaviski wasn't to sleep any that night, or even get a taste of the ice cream which he loved so much. The phone rang, and it was Chief Detective Marty Sauer at the police station.

"Joe?"

"Who the devil did you think it would be, Mickey Mouse?"

"We need you Joe. Bryant Kilgore has been kidnaped!"

"What!"

"Chief O'Toole said get you down here."

"On my way," said Chaviski.

He buckled on his shoulder holster with his snub-nose thirty-eight, slipped a .25 calibre automatic into a coat pocket, snapped off the lights in the house and ran for his car.

Bryant Kilgore was president of the First National Bank of Fort Sanders.

Sauer and Harry Kirkpatrick an FBI agent were with Chief O'Toole, in his office when Chaviski.

"Okay, Joe. You've had

experience in things like this," said the chief. "Come, let's get moving."

Joe Chaviski got into the car with O'Toole and Sauer, while Kirkpatrick followed them in his car.

"We got a call a few minutes ago from Lem Thompson," said Sauer. "That's where they got Kilgore, the kidnapers. The Thompsons phoned the station. Cars No. Four and Eight are at the Thompson house, standing by. No details yet. We've alerted the State Police and all the sheriff and police departments in Western Arkansas and Eastern Oklahoma."

"What kind of car?" Chaviski asked.

"Don't know. That's the tough part. The Thompsons never got to see outside. They were tied up."

"How much are they holding him for?"

"Five hundred thousand dollars."

Joe Chaviski whistled.

Cars Four and Eight were parked in front of the Thompson house, their dome lights blinking. Curious neighbors were standing on their porches or were gathered in little groups, talking to each other. Motor Patrolman Carl Binger stood on the porch of the Thompson house.

"Johnny Haupt is on his way," he said. Haupt was the

fingerprint man and identification officer.

The Thompsons were huddled together on a divan in their living room. "Hi!" Thompson greeted them in a low, strained voice. Thompson was a vice president and the cashier of the bank. He was a slender man, slightly above medium height, bald, about fifty-five years old and not in the best of health. Now his face had a ghastly old ivory color. It was obvious he'd been frightened.

Mrs. Thompson, a sweet little woman with dark brown eyes and a way of doing her hair up in a ball on the back of her head, was about five years younger than her husband and was one of the city's most widely known women. She was always leading drives for charity or for institutions such as the Girls' Club and hospital auxiliaries. She was a gracious woman that all people liked even from the first meeting. But now she looked gray and old, and she was trembling as with a chill. It was the first time Chaviski had ever seen her unsmiling. It was evident she had been terribly frightened.

"We were watching television," said Thompson, "when there was someone at the door. Helen was nearer to the door and answered it, and two men pushed right in on her. They had guns and were wearing masks, long-

hair black wigs, and false black sideburns. They told us they wouldn't hurt us if we behaved ourselves. Then one of them took a small length of rope from his pocket and tied me to my chair. The other told Helen to call Bryant and tell him that I was suddenly sick and that she was worried. Would he please come right over? Of course he said he would.

"Then they tied up Helen. Bryant hurried right on over, and they grabbed him. They tied his hands behind his back and then tore our telephones from the wall. They said when we had managed to untie ourselves to call the police and give them this message: They were kidnaping Bryant and wouldn't hesitate to kill him if they did not receive \$500,000 as directed.

"They said have a one-armed man waiting just south of the stadium at the Arkansas-Baylor game tomorrow at Fayetteville, at 1:45. The man was to have a blue suitcase containing the \$500,000. The money was to be in bills of small denominations, none over \$20. Police are not to interfere with the delivery of the money in anyway and are not to try to follow the two men who make the pick-up. If these rules are obeyed, Bryant Kilgore will be released unharmed within the hour. If they are violated, Bryant will be killed by other members

of the kidnap gang within the hour.

"That's their message, gentlemen. Then they left, taking Bryant with them. I was able to move my chair over to Helen's, and we untied each other within about twenty minutes. We hurried next door and called the police. But of course by that time they could have been many miles out of town."

They gave the usual description of the bandits. One was tall, the other short. They appeared to be fairly young, men in their middle or late twenties. The taller man walked with a limp. One of the voices appeared to be that of a northerner, while the other was typically Arkansas, that of just an average Joe.

"The taller Northerner seemed to be a rather well educated person," said Mrs. Thompson. "He spoke like a college trained man. The other didn't butcher the language or anything like that. It was just a typical voice and choice of words that you hear every day."

Thompson nodded. "One educated, the other just typical voice. But I can tell you they mean business, gentlemen, and dangerous. They will kill Bryant without any qualms at all, and I don't mean maybe. They seemed stirred up, mad at everything. It was frightening experience for

my wife and me. If we had resisted in the slightest or failed to obey their orders in the slightest they would have pistol whipped us, even killed us. Gentlemen, they are two desperate men. Poor old Bryant is in a desperate fix."

"We've got to get the money for them," said Kirkpatrick, the FBI agent. "Pay them off exactly as they say. Get Kilgore home safe first, before we try to do anything else. We'll have a dozen agents in here by morning to work with you fellows on the case. But the main thing to consider is Kilgore's safety. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Chief O'Toole. "Have you got that much cash in the bank, Thompson?"

Thompson nodded. "The vault is set to open Monday at nine, but I've got one key to the dual lock, and Frank Turner, Assistant Cashier, has the other. I'll call Turner now and meet you at the bank within ten minutes."

"I'm going too," said Mrs. Thompson. "You're not leaving me alone in this house after what has happened."

"No, honey," Thompson said, "you had better go be with Mrs. Kilgore. I'm sure one of the officers will take you."

"Oh my goodness!" she said. "Poor Kitty doesn't even know what's happened yet. I've got to

help her." Helen Thompson was herself once more.

There was no sleep for anybody the rest of the night. A police guard stood near while Thompson and Turner got the money ready. They roused, Jack Martin, a one-armed process server for the sheriff's department, and asked him to be the one to hand the blue suitcase over to the kidnapers at the stadium. Martin agreed.

At 1:30 the next afternoon Martin was standing just outside the south end of the stadium, the blue suitcase in his hand. Hundreds of persons were still pouring into the big oval, where tickets for every one of the 45,000 seats had been sold. Two steady streams of slow-moving cars were crawling their way along behind the stadium, on the west side, while traffic officers, state police, Fayetteville police, and University volunteers herded them along to parking places. Inside, the two teams were warming up, and the bands were booming away.

Joe Chaviski and Marty Sauer sat in Joe's car, calmly munching on fried chicken from box lunches. They were parked nose out in a drive-way that faced the rear of the stadium, ready to take off in either direction. Neither would get to see the game within the stadium. They were deeply involved in a game



of their own right now. It would be their job to follow the get-away car of the kidnapers, and radio on ahead to other officers, while following at a discreet distance—the age-old cop's game of seeing and keep from being seen.

Chaviski had been placed in the key spot, because after all he had been off the force for years and would not be recognized as an officer. Marty Sauer might or might not be recognized, but that couldn't be helped. The kidnapers certainly knew that having designated the site of an important Southwest Conference football game as the pick-up place that it would be swarming with law men of all kinds.

"I don't understand this,

Joe," said Sauer. "Of all places why pick a spot where 45,000 people are gathered to stage the pick-up?"

"We're dealing with either some real smart cookie or a danged fool," said Chaviski, "and I believe it's the first."

"Why so?"

"He's depending upon the big crowd, the thousands of cars, to bury himself in. He knows we can't grab him at the pick up because of the danger to all the people, as well as to Bryant Kilgore. Maybe he's got a slick get-away planned through the crowd and figures we'll be impeded in trying to follow. He knows we'll be on his tail—police, sheriffs, FBI, everybody."

Sauer lit a cigarette. Both had been on scores of stake-outs together, but this one, outside a crowded football stadium just before an important game was the strangest of all.

It was 1:40 now. They knew Martin was in place with the blue suitcase containing \$500,000. The shrewdness and audacity of the whole affair had convinced Joe that they were dealing with a smart man. Who in all Fort Sanders could be expected to dig up a half million dollars in a matter of hours, except the president of the city's largest bank?

Joe Chaviski kept thinking too of the description of the

voices of the two men. One, the Thompsons had said, was that of a person apparently college trained and a Northerner. The other was that of an ordinary type of man, one of a hundred you would see down town any day of the week. And, Chaviski concluded, the latter probably was a home-towner who at least knew the name of the president of the bank and where he lived, and the name and residence of the vice president and cashier and where he lived. And he was well aware of the Arkansas-Baylor football game at Fayetteville, when it would be played, and the general lay-out of the stadium. He had cased the job well.

Joe Chaviski grinned: "Be something if one of our Arkansas football players ran out and grabbed that suitcase, wouldn't it? I'd hate to tangle with one of those buckos."

"Yeah. I think some of them are almost as big as you are Joe." That was a sly jab at Chaviski's trim 255 pound weight.

For the tenth time in the last five minutes Chaviski looked at his watch.

"It's time," Marty Sauer said. "It sure is. If this is just a false alarm I'm going to break those kidnapers' necks when they do show up. I've been waiting all year to watch this big football game."

"They heard the noise down

the valley immediately south of the stadium.

"Look!" Sauer shouted. "Look! A helicopter."

A helicopter it was. A small type red helicopter was sweeping in low over the football practice field to the south.

"My God!" said Chaviski. "So that's their scheme! They are going to make the pick-up by helicopter."

"They can laugh at our highway network!" said Sauer.

Both remembered back in 1969, when President Nixon's giant helicopter had come sweeping in through the rain and the fog over the Ozark mountains to land just south of Razorback Stadium, as the No. 1 "Shoot out" of the college football season between Texas and Arkansas for the National Championship was just getting under way.

Now this lighter helicopter was settling down like a great praying mantis in the exact spot where Nixon's helicopter had put down!

Within seconds the helicopter had taken off again, and the police radio cracked in Chaviski and Sauer's ears. "Attention all cars, Code XYZ, the kidnapers have made their pickup from Martin by helicopter! Their red helicopter is leaving Razorback stadium in a southeasterly direction. All cars in network try



to spot helicopter's route. It is presently heading directly southeast over the Ozark Mountains. Repeating, Code XYZ. Plan A is in effect. Take great care. Kidnapers are armed and dangerous."

Joe Chaviski picked up his mike: "Chaviski-Sauer reporting. Following Plan A."

His car shot out into the street, weaving around the crawling vehicles of late-arriving fans, which were still moving northward past the rear of the stadium. Other police cars were acknowledging the alert.

"Where we heading, Joe?" asked Sauer.

"I think I recognized that helicopter," said Chaviski. "It's the Alexandorf helicopter they use on the big Alexandorf ranch

in the river bottoms between Alma and Mulberry."

"Alexandorf wouldn't have anything to do with a thing like this."

"Certainly not. And his 'copter pilot, Charlie Hamlin, wouldn't either. Both are probably at the game."

"Then who is the pilot?"

"That's the sixty-four dollar question," Joe Chaviski shouted as his car cut in and out of the oncoming traffic. "Plenty of helicopter pilots are back from Vietnam. There are bound to be some rotten eggs among them. One of them could be at the controls."

The red helicopter now had disappeared from sight. It had maintained a steady course to the southeast over the mountain area. By now Chaviski had cleared most of the game traffic on the side road and turned into U.S. 71, opening up at ninety miles an hour, heading south.

"Where we going so danged fast, Joe? You could radio the Crawford and Franklin county sheriff offices or the state police to put a watch on the Alexandorf field and have them waiting there when the copter puts down."

Chaviski said, "Like I figured, we're dealing with a pretty sharp cookie. The Alexandorf field is the last place he wants to put down with that half a million

bucks. He don't plan to go half that far, the way I figure it. Listen to that radio. Every lawman in Arkansas by this time will be studying the sky looking for a red helicopter, and the same thing in eastern Oklahoma and southern Missouri. The longer it stays in the air, the farther the crooks travel, the more eyes will spot the chopper."

"So?"

"He's flying right now over the thickest, roughest part of the Ozarks, nothing below him but thousands of acres of trees and mountain boulders. He'll put right down in the middle of it somewhere, and I've got a hunch the spot he'll pick is the clearing atop White Rock. That's about thirty miles air-line, I figure, southeast of Fayetteville. It's as high as any other mountain top, partly cleared up there, with access road for his get-away car."

Marty Sauer reached for the car mike.

"No!" said Chaviski. "Not a word to them yet."

"Joe! You're not going to try to do this all by yourself are you?"

"I'm not. But suppose those guys in the chopper have a short wave radio. They've thought of everything else. If so they are picking up every broadcast we make. It's now five minutes until two o'clock. I figure right about

now he's putting down at White Rock. Five or six minutes from now they will be in the car, putting as much distance between them and where they put down as possible.

"But all I've got to back up my reasoning is a hunch. There's plenty of smart men working on this case right now, and some of them are bound to guess just as well as I am. Besides I don't want to appear any bigger fool than necessary, if they sight the helicopter down near Little Rock."

Three minutes passed. Then came the news over the police network: "Attention all cars. Code XYZ. The helicopter used in the Fayetteville money pick-up has been identified as belonging to Jim Alexandorf, Alma rancher and planter. Alexandorf and his pilot, Charlie Hamlin, were in Razorback stadium when the helicopter made its appearance. Units in the Alma-Mulberry vicinity are directed to be on the alert. Take station near Alexandorf landing field. Be careful. Code XYZ."

"Darn it," said Joe Chaviski, when his watch showed it was two o'clock, "right now it's kick-off time! We're going to miss the whole game. Those Baylor Bears are almost as hard for the Razorbacks to handle as the Longhorns. Always have been. They're tough!"

At five after two they were turning off Highway 71 into the Winfrey Valley-White Rock road, south of Burns Gables and Mount Gayler. Chaviski reached for the mike: "Car Ten-A reporting. Following Plan A. Long out!" That would tell headquarters that he was doing something at least—and didn't want to break silence anymore.

"Ten-Four, Car Ten-A," came back the voice of the dispatcher.

The car bounced as they navigated the long, winding descent into Winfrey Valley and the heart of the Ozark National Forest. Down they careened for several hundred feet, then they were crossing Hurricane Creek and beginning to climb up the tortuous incline that led to the high elevation called White Rock.

The countryside was beautiful, but there was no time to enjoy the scenery. For the scent of the quarry was in Chaviski's nostrils, his old heart was pumping at twice its regular rate.

He didn't understand, he never had been able to understand how his body, and his senses knew things on a manhunt when his mind was still in the dark. All he had in the world right now to back up this screaming ride into the middle of this wild section of mountain country was his hunch.

"Even if he were right, if the

helicopter had put down on White Rock, there were two other routes out of the hills the kidnapers could take. They could head due east and come out on Highway 23, some ten or fifteen miles beyond White Rock. Or they might take the old dirt road, really a trail, that led south past Shore Lake, and go from there by paved road to Mulberry and Interstate 40 or U.S. 64.

Chaviski's hand reached for the mike, again, but then he hung it back up without contacting the station. "There's a chance we can sneak up on them. No need revealing our location and have them pick us up. If we find they've been at White Rock and went out the other way, then will be time to spread the net."

On a straight stretch through a pine grove near the rise to the top of White Rock, they glimpsed a car coming towards them. Instantly Joe Chaviski blocked the road.

"Battle stations!" said Sauer. Chaviski reached overhead to his deer-gun rack and pulled down his .30-.30 carbine. Sauer got a 12-gauge automatic shotgun loaded with buckshot, from the back seat.

The oncoming car skidded to a stop, swerving crosswise in the narrow road. The rear door opened, and a rifle bullet almost parted Sauer's hair permanently.



as he dropped to the ground. Chaviski's carbine opened up and Sauer's shotgun roared. The fight was furious and quick. Only the driver of the other car had been passive through it all. He came from beneath the wheel with his hands in the air.

Chaviski and Sauer advanced, guns at the ready. But everything was over. Three hoodlums were dead, one in the front seat of the car, one in the back and one lay on the ground by the side of the car. The man on the ground was young Bart MacMillian, Alma mechanic and Vietnam veteran. A bullet had gone through his heart.

They put handcuffs on the fourth man.

"All right," said Joe Chaviski, "where's the banker?"

The fellow was mute.

The car yielded a blue suitcase, smeared with blood. Marty Sauer snapped it open. It was filled with currency.

"Close it and put it in the trunk," said Chaviski, handing Marty Sauer the right key.

"It's all over," said Chaviski to the prisoner. "Why don't you open up and talk?"

The kidnap suddenly broke into tears. "They were my buddies. We fought in Vietnam together," he said. "Now they're gone. All gone! Why didn't you shoot me too?"

"Because you didn't resist,"

said Chaviski. "What happened to Kilgore?"

"On back there on the mountain," said the hood. "He's all right."

"Dang it anyway!" said Marty Sauer.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm wounded!" He had run his hand through his hair, and there was a single drop of blood on one of his fingers.

They found Bryan Kilgore safe and unharmed at a house on top of White Rock, where he had been held since the night before. The kidnapers had held the family prisoners also through the night, cutting their telephone line. Within a hundred feet of the house was the red Alexandorf helicopter. Joe Chaviski's hunch had been right!

That evening, back in Chief O'Toole's office in Fort Sanders, they got the rest of the story from the lips of the lone survivor of the kidnap gang. His name was John Pike. It was his first experience with crime. He figured society owed him some big money for all the months he had spent in Vietnam as a lieutenant and helicopter pilot. Young MacMillian had been his mechanic. On one especially hot pickup under close Viet Cong fire, MacMillian had leaped out of the chopper and was helping get two wounded soldiers on board when he was hit in the

back. But MacMillian had crawled back to the craft under his own power. Lieutenant Pike himself had been hit in the hip, but he remained at the spot under fire until all the men were in the copter and then had flown them back to base.

Back in the hospital all four of them had got together. They were bitter about the war and vowed they would make society pay once they were back in the States. They planned to shoot for high stakes, and they didn't care how they made it.

Young MacMillian had got a job as a mechanic in an Alma garage and was attending junior college in Fort Sanders nights. Pike came through on a visit, with the "big plan" in mind—the kidnaping of a bank executive for high stakes. Together they worked out the details, theft of the helicopter, and the timing, and got in touch with the other two veterans. One lived in

Memphis, the other in Texas. They had shot for high stakes, all right, half a million dollars from the largest bank in Fort Sanders."

O'Toole suddenly swung around on Joe Chaviski and Marty Sauer. "What I want to know is why you two rummies didn't answer back on radio when we tried to get you. All we knew was that you were following Plan A—that is, you were pursuing the pick-up men. But what we couldn't figure out was pursuing them where? When they were off to the wild blue yonder in a helicopter!"

"Why, Chief, you can't pick up anything on radio or send out a signal you can hear from way down in Winfrey Valley," Joe Chaviski lied hurriedly. "We tried and tried to let you know." He turned towards Sauer and gave him a wink.

Marty Sauer just mopped his brow and said nothing.

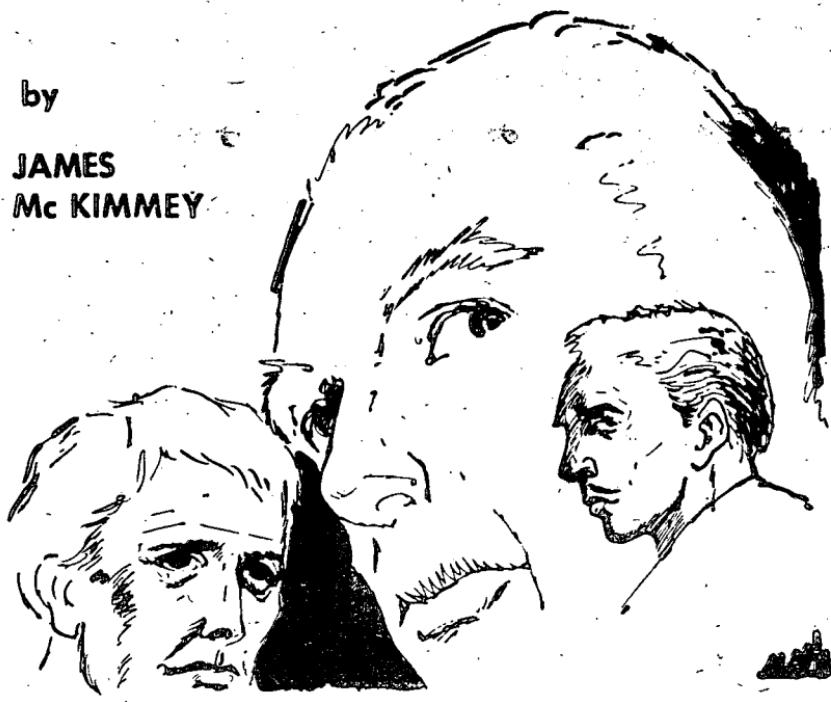
Next Month's Dual Headlines:

BLUE MURDER by BRETT HALLIDAY
The New Mike Shayne Short Novel

THE SENSUOUS CORPSE by JACK WEBB
A New Short Novel of Tremendous Suspense

by

JAMES
Mc KIMMEY



THE IMPERSONATION

He was a recluse, a legend, lost forever in the shadows.

So—why shouldn't I become him and get rich?

HE LEANED forward on a chair in his small bedroom and studied the results of his carefully applied make-up in a vanity mirror that had come with this tiny furnished house Ralph Benjamin Philbrook had rented in San Francisco's Mission District.

His face was long and gaunt and pale, with heavy wrinkles beneath eyes made a grayish blue by the use of contact lenses. His forehead was long and extended by the scalp mask which created a semi-bald look. The wig he wore over that was a sparse display of silvered hair

that curled over the backs of his ears.

He tapped the pinched nostrils of his nose and decided that they would stay pinched until this was over.

He took a breath, feeling his pulse drumming in his temples, and looked at the newspaper clippings tacked to the wall around the mirror. Each contained pictures of a younger version of the image he'd just examined in his mirror. And under each picture was the identifying name: J. Walter Talley. One feature story was headed: WHY DO THE VERY RICH BECOME RECLUSIVE?

Finally he stood up, satisfied that J. Walter Talley would have aged during the last three years he'd chosen to live in seclusion in precisely the fashion Philbrook had created with his make-up.

Hunching his shoulders slightly beneath his conservative black suit, he now studied his manner of clasping both hands behind his back and leaning forward slightly at the waist, with his legs splayed and knees bent a little—Talley's famous and much-photographed pose.

"Ah, splendid, my man," he said aloud in the somewhat breathless, oddly high-pitched voice Philbrook had been practicing for weeks now. "Splendid, indeed."

He reached out to a small cassette recorder and started a tape which contained the famous testimony J. Walter Talley had delivered to a Senate sub-committee investigating the ballooning of mutual funds in 1966, which Philbrook had taken from a recent replay by a local San Francisco station as part of a program focused on the life of the financier, interest about whom had increased greatly as the result of his current insistence on total privacy.

Out came the same somewhat breathless, high-pitched voice Philbrook had just heard from his own mouth.

He nodded, turned off the tape, then removed a heavy, old-fashioned pocket watch from his vest to look at the time. His hand began to tremble. But he quickly controlled that and put the watch away.

He then walked into the living room and sat down at a battered desk where he picked up a dog-eared sheet of stationery upon which was J. Walter Talley's letterhead and a neatly-typed message of little consequence directed to a small corporation in Chicago—Philbrook had stolen it from Talley's rural mailbox located at the gated entrance to his coastal retreat down the Penin-

sula. The text was followed by Talley's back-slanted signature. Philbrook picked up his own pen and, on a blank sheet of paper, began duplicating that signature again and again.

Reassured that he had mastered the art, he checked the time again, then opened a drawer of the desk and removed a sheet of onionskin upon which was imprinted a carbon copy of a letter typed with the same styled type that had been used on J. Walter Talley's dog-eared letter. The original of this one had been written and mailed by Philbrook to Mr. Vincent C. Scott, president of the Western Bank of the United States, with headquarters on California Street in San Francisco. The message said:

My Dear Vincent:

On Wednesday, September 6th, contingent upon the condition of the market, I shall be selling my mutual-fund investment with the Whithers Group. As you know, my original intention was not the highest possible return for my capital, but to stimulate activity in the mutual-fund program in general, being a silent partner in both Severs, Young & Smith and Sterling-Sears. But I now find it necessary to divert these funds to other channels. I shall not inform Mr. Albert Engel at

Whithers, or anyone else for that matter, of my decision until the day of the transaction. And I shall not expect you to, for obvious reasons. I simply desire that you have ready for me the necessary cash to cover the Whithers check I will deliver to you personally, which will be in the vicinity of \$150,000.00. Needless to say this transaction should take place in the privacy of your own office. I will arrive as anonymously as I am able, during late morning.

*Very sincerely,
J. Walter Talley.*

Philbrook's hands began trembling again. He propped his elbows on the desk and then his jaw on his fists to stop it. The excitement was predictable, he told himself; this was the day he had been seeking all of his adult life. Never mind the other things he'd attempted, he thought stubbornly. No matter if something had always gone wrong, starting with his education at City College.

Oh, yes, he thought, feeling again the first fury and frustration he'd experienced then. He'd had no money, and so he'd worked like a slave in a grocery store nights to pay for his way. Then, as graduation had approached, he still lacked credit for a single semester in Latin, a course he'd failed four

times running. So this time he gave up sleep and pressed to master at last the language he so hated. But he'd known, finally, that he would fail again. consequently he broke into the office of his Latin instructor the night before the examination to make a copy of the intended test, was caught and kicked out of school.

Oh, yes, indeed, he thought. And after that all of the other things, including the job he'd managed to get as a life-insurance salesman. He'd turned out to be a first-rate salesman. But records had confused him. And when it was ultimately discovered that his books were hopelessly jumbled so that the company had no knowledge whatever of who had paid Philbrook what, he was canned.

And so it was back to grocery work, which was terminated when his hand was found in the till. And then a dozen other insignificant jobs after that. And all of them washing out when some stupid thing went wrong.

Then, finally, after he'd thought his way through very clearly and thoroughly as well, preparing himself exceedingly well, he'd gone to the sleek offices of the Whithers Group in downtown San Francisco, equipped with his recently gained knowledge of the world

of the stock market as well as a most impressive education dossier to prove his capabilities. He was hired immediately, and he set out with a vengeance to make his mark.

And once again he did exceedingly well. He was a natural salesman and because those were the days of the bull market. But then, worst of luck, the market fell apart. Commissions began melting away. He'd become difficult and snappish with his fellow employees, until one of them, an executive secretary named Miss Rawls who had the viciousness of a female lion with cubs, had finally checked on the validity of Philbrook's stated background and discovered that he had never even seen Harvard's School of Business, let alone graduated from it. Mr. Albert Engel himself, president of Whithers, had fired him with cold contempt.

And so it was downhill again. This job, that, anything to provide food, clothing and shelter for himself.

But now all of that was going to be changed. Because at long last, as the result of a life-long penchant for mimicry, he had figured out the perfect plan to provide a lifetime of the kind of living he deserved.

True, he reminded himself,



some basic things *could* go wrong. J. Walter Talley, for example, might suddenly decide to end his seclusion and suddenly appear in public, now, today. But the odds were almost totally against it.

Then, if not that, there was the possibility that the president of the bank to whom Philbrook had sent the letter, Vincent Scott, might attempt to contact Talley by telephone, despite the instructions that Philbrook had written him. But Philbrook had already tested what would undoubtedly happen in that instance. Having gotten the private number of that coastal retreat of Talley's while he was employed by the Whithers Group, Philbrook had dialed it and explained to one of Talley's aides that he was Vincent C. Scott, president of Western Bank, one of those

banks used by Mr. Talley, and would Mr. Talley please come to the phone? The aide had hung up.

So, yes, Philbrook considered, something could indeed go wrong. But there was another and far better way to view it, he assured himself, based on a feeling he'd had ever since he'd devised the plan: no man's luck could remain bad for his entire life. And if he had worked this out with the utmost care, planning every detail no matter how minute, and worked as he'd never worked before to perfect the role he was about to assume, then that luck would finally have to reverse itself and go with him, this time.

Philbrook lifted the telephone on his desk and dialed the number of the Whithers Group. Without identifying himself, he asked for the current value of its shares. He was told that Whithers had gone up .15 that morning.

Ah, yes, he thought, smiling and hanging up, he was totally ready. And nothing, absolutely nothing, was going to go wrong this time.

Downtown San Francisco was bathed in bright September sunshine as Philbrook, carrying a briefcase and wearing a black hat, stepped out of the Montgomery Street garage

where he'd parked his second-hand sedan. He had three blocks to travel, on foot in the financial district, to reach the building containing the Whithers Group. He had, at one point, considered leaving much of his disguise in the briefcase for this interval and then putting it on in a rest room of the Whithers Building. But he had finally decided against that. As Ralph Philbrook, an ex-employee of the company, he was known in that building. And if something happened that would require him to flee later on, he would much rather flee not having been seen as himself, in the building.

But then he wasn't going to have to flee, he thought with determination as he moved through the late-morning air. Everything was going to work perfectly.

The large plastic-looking lobby of the Whithers Building contained no one but himself, he saw with relief as he stepped into it. The market was hurting and the rats were continuing to desert the ship, he thought with smug satisfaction. He moved on to elevators then, which were also nearly inactive, with a single elevator operator working, a lazy-looking youngster whose eyes reflected no recognition whatever.

"Five," Philbrook said

crisply, and stepped into the cubicle to be lifted to the reception room of Mr. Albert Engel's office.

There, Philbrook found the continued luck he knew would be his today. Not another soul was in the room except Engel's secretary, the despicable Miss Rawls. Philbrook watched with amused relish as her arrogance visibly faded when she looked up and saw him.

"Mr. *Talley*!" she whispered, looking shocked.

"Softly," Philbrook said in his breathless, high-pitched voice, placing his free hand behind his back and hunching his shoulders. "Softly, Miss Rawls."

"But . . . I didn't expect—"

"Of course, you didn't," Philbrook snapped. "Tell Mr. Engel I wish to see him!"

She continued staring, then her head bobbed. She lifted a phone, dialed and said, "Mr. Engel, Mr. *Talley* is here!"

She started to get up, but Philbrook motioned her down and moved toward a door, saying, "And please refrain from phoning up the newspapers and telling them I'm here, will you, Miss Rawls?"

"Oh, Mr. *Talley*! I wouldn't remotely—"

But then Philbrook was inside Albert Engel's massive office.

The other man—small and boyish-looking despite his middle years—jumped up from behind his great desk, saying, "Walter!" He then threw himself forward to grasp Philbrook's hand, and Philbrook kept the hand limp and unresponsive—he'd once actually shaken hands with J. Walter Talley in this building; it was the way Talley did it.

"Albert," he said, remembering the times he'd heard Talley address Engel in that simple fashion.

"Walter, Walter! I just can't believe this!"

"Why the hell not?" Philbrook said crisply. "I'm here, am I not?"

Engel's smile was that of the crafty salesman he used to be, hiding the swift movement of his cold-blooded brain. But Philbrook could see the gathering of sweat beads on his forehead.

"Here," Engel said, moving a chair in front of his desk. "Please sit down. Right in this chair!"

"I recognize a chair when I see one," Philbrook said, and sat down.

Engel scurried around his desk and dropped into his own chair, staring at Philbrook with bright, puzzled, frightened eyes. "But why, Walter? After so long a time—"

"I'm cashing in my chips," Philbrook replied shortly.

Engel blinked. "With *us* do you mean? But, I mean, you can't possibly—"

"What do you mean I can't possibly?" He removed his pocket watch and looked at it. "Let's get started, shall we?"

"But—"

"Will you *begin*, Albert?"

"Yes, of course, Walter!" He transmitted swift orders to Miss Rawls in her office, then leaned back with his steady false smile and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. "I just simply can't believe this!"

"You're beginning to sound like a broken record, Albert."

"Well, but what I mean, what I was thinking, Walter, is this going to get out? Because if—"

"Not unless somebody in this company lets it out."

"No!" Engel said loudly. "Absolutely not! I would personally—" He gained control. "You understand better than anyone, Walter, what it would do. You, our most prominent investor. And with the market as it is right now—"

"I understand how the market is right now," Philbrook said.

Engel laughed nervously. "I should never doubt that J. Walter Talley knows what he's doing. I just don't know what's

the matter with me today. It's that I'm so surprised. Flabbergasted would be a better way of putting it. And I'm wondering, ah, if you would mind telling me why you've ventured forth into the world again, so to speak, Walter? Instead of doing this by mail. I mean if you'd care to tell me?"

Philbrook sat coldly silent, then he said, "What's holding this up?"

"Miss Rawls is typing up the papers as fast as she can, I'm sure," Engel managed, wiping his forehead again. "And the check has to be signed by—"

"Just so it's done!"

"Shortly, Walter! I promise." Engel's smile became even more strained. "And let's see now. How are your, ah, flowers growing, Walter? I remember how you treasure your flowers, wherever you're living."

"My flowers are growing fine, Albert," Philbrook said, feeling confidence flowing through him now.

"Oh, that's so good to hear! And that other hobby of yours..." Philbrook could see in the man's eyes the way Engel's brain was working to desperately to recall it. "Yes! That weapon collection. From World War One, wasn't it?"

"Two," Philbrook said dryly, knowing precisely that

the correction was accurate. "I'm getting truly impatient, Albert."

The door was opened then, and Miss Rawls danced across the room to put papers and a check on Engel's desk. She looked at Philbrook with wide eyes, saying, "You know exactly where to have him sign, Mr. Engel?"

"Of course, I know where to have him sign!" Engel exploded, his smile erased for the first time. Then he found that smile again, motioned Miss Rawls out of the room and picked up a pen to hold it toward Philbrook solicitously. "Walter?"

Then, for a second, Philbrook felt a sudden quivering all through him, and he knew that his hand was starting to shake again. But the doubt left just as swiftly, and he was in charge once more. He signed where Engel was pointing, surely and without hesitation. Again and again, until it was done.

Engel picked up the check. "I suppose you know the exact value reached today—"

"I do," Philbrook said, getting up. "The point is, are you going to give it to me or not?"

"Yes, sir!" Engel said, jumping up and handing him the check. "And if there's

anything else we can do, Walter, anything at all."

"You can keep quiet about my having been here," Philbrook said and left the room. He passed Miss Rawls without looking at her, and pressed the elevator button, and was taken down, and left the lobby to step into the street, unable to keep from smiling himself now, knowing that all that remained was the simple matter of cashing the check now in his pocket.

Ten minutes later he was in the equally massive office of Mr. Vincent C. Scott, president of the Western Bank of the United States. Scott, a man of much girth and a face that looked as docile as that of a lazy hound's, stood up and shook hands solemnly. Philbrook had only been able to see pictures of Scott, to this moment. But there was very little to worry about now, he told himself, because in another few minutes he would be gone from here, with the money in his briefcase. He would shed every particle of disguise he was now using.

And from that point on it was going to be nothing but fields of clover.

"How are you, Walter?" Scott asked gently.

"Splendid, Vincent," Philbrook said. "Just splendid."

"Please sit down, won't you?" Scott said, easing back into his own chair. "This is so pleasant to see you again, you know."

"Pleasant to see you again, too, Vincent." There had been no possible way for him to know if Talley had addressed the man as Vincent or Vince. But obviously the luck was continuing to run well, and Vincent was correct.

"Have you been truly well, Walter?" Scott asked, peering at Philbrook with his lazy-dog eyes.

"Truly," Philbrook said, nodding. "And to get to the point—" He removed the check from an inside jacket pocket, placed it on Scott's desk and signed it swiftly, without the faintest quiver of nerves now. "There you are," he said, pushing the check forward.

"Yes," Scott said. "There we are, Walter."

"And you have the money ready?"

"Of course." The large man opened a drawer and began taking out stacks of currency. "You can begin counting, Walter."

"I shall," Philbrook said, knowing very well that J. Walter Talley would count it down to the last penny.

Scott leaned back and again gazed placidly at Philbrook as

he counted. "You honestly prefer cash, eh, Walter?"

"As my letter indicated," Philbrook agreed.

"I'm sure you have a good reason."

"I do."

"But I rather thought you might have arrived with one or two of your people. You know: Just in case."

Philbrook smiled faintly. "They're in the bank."

Scott nodded. "But not known to us."

"Precisely," Philbrook said, and began putting the currency into his briefcase.

"Correct?" Scott asked, motioning a hand toward the money.

"Absolutely."

"Well, then. Would you like a drink before you leave, Walter?"

"No," Philbrook said, standing, "but thank you anyway."

Scott rose with him. They shook hands. "Always a pleasure to see you, Walter."

"And you, too, Vincent," Philbrook stated. He smiled. He turned. He left.

And then, when he again stepped out into the sea-cooled air, he knew with a rushing surge of elation that he'd done it, with not a single hitch, not an error, not a slight stroke of bad luck. It had absolutely worked, and all he had to do

now was return to his car, remove the disguise, and then...

He felt hands suddenly gripping both of his arms. He looked right and saw a hard-faced man in a business suit staring at him coolly. He looked left and saw a second who seemed somehow to look very much like the first. Philbrook began blinking rapidly. One of the men tried to pull the briefcase from his hand, but he hung on tightly, managing, "What do you think you're doing!"

"Let go of it!" one of the men said.

"You heard him," said the other, showing Philbrook the pistol he was holding under his jacket.

Philbrook let go, still blinking quickly. "I don't know who you are!"

"Police inspectors," one said softly.

"Police inspectors!" Philbrook gasped. Some of the passers-by were now looking at them, he realized. Two stopped and stared curiously. "Well, then... prove it!"

"We will," said a detective, "when we get you back into Mr. Scott's office and return this money to where it belongs. Now let's go. No fussing, do you hear?"

Minutes later he was back in

Vincent C. Scott's office. The portly banker sat behind his desk, smiling softly as the detectives handcuffed Philbrook's wrists behind his back and searched him for a weapon.

"All of the money has to be in the briefcase," one of the detectives said to Scott. "You watched him going out of this office. We had him covered every second after that. Did you touch the check on the desk after he signed it, Mr. Scott?"

"Not on your life," said Scott, pointing a pudgy finger at where it rested on the desk exactly where Philbrook had pushed it.

"Then it should have some nice prints to go with the ones on the currency." He nodded, looking at Philbrook. "And you just about got away with it, didn't you? Would you have thought it was anyone but J. Walter Talley, Mr. Scott?"

"Certainly not."

"But just one little thing went wrong, didn't it?" the detective said to Philbrook. "And Mr. Scott caught it. And you walked into the trap."

"You knew who I was all the time?" Philbrook called, looking at Scott as rage and frustration pumped through him. "But how?"

"We didn't know who you were," Scott said pleasantly.

"Only who you weren't. Which is to say we knew you weren't Walter Talley."

"And Engel knew I wasn't, too?"

"Well," Scott said, "I'm well enough acquainted with Albert Engel to have felt that he might have given a hint or two away if we told him. So we didn't. These men simply followed you into the Whithers Building after you got on an elevator there, and then followed you out. If you hadn't come directly here, they would have stopped you with this check. But this way, you further implicated yourself by cashing the check and taking the money out of the bank. Which is what these gentlemen hoped you would do, wasn't it?"

"Exactly," said one of the officers.

Philbrook's mouth was dry. And he felt himself quivering again. He couldn't find his voice for a moment. But then he said, shrilly, "But how did you know!"

Scott touched his intercom. "Is Mr. Talley now beside your desk, Miss Smith?"

"Yes, sir," came the reply.

"Then tell him he may come in now."

Philbrook whirled to face the door, which was opened seconds later by Scott's secretary. Then, moving forward

with his arms angled back in that familiar hands-behind-the-back pose, came J. Walter Talley. He stopped and leaned forward at the waist with his legs splayed and knees bent slightly to stare at Philbrook.

"Incredible," he said finally in his breathless, high-pitched voice. "Worth coming out of hiding just to look at him. Absolutely incredible!"

"I repeat!" Philbrook yelled. "How did you find out!"

"Well," Scott said cheerfully, "it was the signature on that letter you sent me in Mr. Talley's name."

"What was the matter with it!"

"Not one solitary thing," J. Walter Talley said. "Would have thought it was my own if I hadn't known better. But, you see, my man, I managed to play a bit foolishly with a grenade in my weapons collection several months ago. And so—" Philbrook stared as Talley brought his arms forward to reveal that the hands Philbrook had assumed were clasped behind his back no longer existed. There were only stumps beneath Talley's trim cuffs.

"Vincent, as one of my bankers, was one of the very few who knew about this. And so he knew I couldn't have signed that letter you sent. Got through to me about it after a

good deal of difficulty and then set this up with these fine gentlemen representing the law. Realize now that I should have informed a lot of other people, including the people at Whithers. But I've hesitated facing the world at all these last years, especially after the accident. Now—well, I rather think I'll have to get back into things. Get some artificial assistance and learn to use it, so I can sign my name again. Safer that way, obviously. And I can at least thank you for coming to that decision, anyway, Mr.—"

"You might as well tell us, you know," one of the detectives said to Philbrook.

Philbrook was silent for a moment; and it was as though, in that moment, he saw his entire life running by—a swift river of destiny with no change in its pattern at all, never, not even the tiniest one. The same river, running the same course

"Well?" said a detective.

"Philbrook!" he called loudly.

"All right, Philbrook," one said, grasping his right arm. "Let's go."

"Ralph Philbrook!" he shouted as they pulled him across the room past J. Walter Talley. "Ralph Benjamin Philbrook!" he screamed to the world.



DETECTIVES BY GASLIGHT

SAM MOSKOWITZ

Introduces

THE LAST STORY

by SIR EDMUND C. COX

IN THE DECADES that immediately followed the truly made success of *Sherlock Holmes*, not unreasonably, many a writer urged on, undoubtedly, by magazine publishers envious of the STRAND MAGAZINE and its great success of the Arthur Conan Doyle stories—attempted to tap the wondrous mother lode of net paid circulation via simulations of Holmesian deductive reasoning, all with various degrees of success. Many great amateur sleuths would ultimately arise to inherit the Inverness cape and deer-stalker hat of the opium-smoking master. One of these was John Carruthers, a policeman stationed in India. But who was he and his creator—Sir Edmond C. Cox, Bart?

It is only in the last 30 years that any serious attempts have been made to compile authoritative bibliographies of the detective

The man who started it all—the man who practically invented the ubiquitous private eye—had his instantaneous imitators—fortunately for us, or, all of those extraordinary sleuths and their remarkable stories might have remained still-born. Success bred rivals, and *Sherlock Holmes*' contemporaries will pass through these pages, ably selected and scholarly introduced by SAM MOSKOWITZ. Famed friends will ride hansom cabs once again.

story. Within the past five many of the old commentaries on the detective story were brought back into print and some imposing new bibliographies like a Catalogue of Crime by Jacques Barzun & Wendell Hertig Taylor with 831 pages of bibliographical matter and Who Done It? by Ordean A. Hagen with 834 oversized pages of listings of detective and mystery stories were published. Neither the old standards that have been reprinted or these two modern giants list the name of Sir Edmund C. Cox, Bart. And there is not even a footnote about John Carruthers, Indian Policeman. Yet, he was a detective fully in the tradition of Sherlock Holmes and most decidedly a contemporary. And this story will prove it.

Apparently Sir Edmund C. Cox was someone of repute, though history has obscured his achievements. When the first of the John Carruthers stories appeared in the January, 1904 issue, of CASSELL'S MAGAZINE with a muted note of respect, stated in their introduction. "The Editor has great pleasure in calling attention to this remarkable series of Indian detective stories contributed by so great an authority upon Indian police methods as Sir Edmund Cox. The stories will

be found, the Editor thinks, to possess all the fascinations of the modern detective story with the glamour and the mystery of Eastern romance."

The first story was titled The Fate of Abdulla. The series was billed as, "Leaves from the Note-Book of John Carruthers, Indian Policeman." It ran intermittently for eight stories which culminated with The Dutch Engineer in the September, 1904 issue of CASSELL'S MAGAZINE. Then, there was nothing further until the October, 1905 issue, when The Last Story appeared. This is in many ways the most remarkable of the series. All the others have taken place in India, but in this story, the aging detective has been retired on a pension and returns to England. His last case involves him in a series of incidents whose solution and the setting of the action reminds one very much of Sherlock Holmes. One month later, CASSELL'S announced the appearance of the entire series under their imprint in hard covers titled John Carruthers: Indian Policeman.

CASSELL'S MAGAZINE had been in the past and would remain in the future a mecca for detective story lovers. R. Austin Freeman was already writing his early material for them and contemporaneously

with John Carruthers they were running their delightful stories of The Burglars Club by Henry A Hering. The John Bell, Ghost Exposers series had appeared some years earlier and they were priming their pages for Jacques Futrelle's clever Thinking Machine stories. Since CASSELL'S was one of the half-dozen leading magazines in

England during the turn of the century, its preoccupation with detective stories had a great deal to do with their spreading popularity.

We trust that when and if the two modern giants go into new editions they'll include John Carruthers and Edmund C. Cox—worthy contemporaries of Holmes and Doyle.

THE LAST STORY

by SIR EDMUND C. COX

GOOD-BYE to India. Was I glad or sorry? It was hard to say.

Thirty years are a big slice out of a man's life, and one cannot sever one's connection with all that this means without some tinge of regret. I had had my full share of troubles, cares, cruel hard work, spells of fever and other tropical delights, and, perhaps worst of all, grievous home-sickness and resentment at having to pass so many years in exile.

On the other hand, I quitted India with my constitution unimpaired. I could look back upon many joys, and a life in spite of all its drawbacks, of activity, adventure, and good

fellowship. In my official career I had, like most men, experienced disappointments, and heart-burnings. But, on the whole, I had met with even more success than I could have ventured to anticipate.

At the age of fifty I was retiring on a pension of five hundred pounds a year—little enough to live upon as I wished to live, but enough to substantially supplement the private income that I was fortunate enough to possess. I had also earned one of the highest prizes that India can confer, and I left its shores as Sir John Carruthers, K.C.I.E.

I could reasonably look

forward to years of health and strength and interest in life. Moreover, India was not what it was when I first joined the Service. Then the Sahib's *hukum* (order) was sufficient; but now, through many insidious changes, a total bouleversement of antecedent conditions had gradually taken place. Latterly the immediate consequence of the issue of any order by the Sahib was an exhibition of profound ingenuity on the part of his native fellow-subjects to devise means for having the order set aside. It was all right to do away with racial distinctions; but those who had undergone their training in older and more patriarchal times found the new *regime* exceedingly irksome.

So I settled down in my little place in Surrey. I had my horses and dogs. I enjoyed shooting and golf, and manifested all possible interest in the local flower show and parish pump. I had taken furlough several times from India and had always kept myself up with what was going on at home, in politics, sport, and the stage. So I do not think that I showed myself out of it, as many old Indians undoubtedly do on their return home. I soon found myself on satisfactory terms with my neighbours, and I certainly cannot complain of

their want of hospitality; but in truth the life was tame and insipid after the rattling good times that I enjoyed in the East.

However, the element of excitement was closer upon me than I had any reason to imagine. I was dreamily watching a beautiful ring from my Manilla gradually soar into the air and fade away, as my thoughts dwelt on a certain grand pig-sticking meet at Somapur followed by a magnificent ball at the club, when the tinkle of a bicycle bell recalled my attention to existing circumstances. Glancing down the drive, I saw a young man and a girl riding towards me. The man, who might have been two or three and twenty, was good-looking, with fair complexion, good features, and an expression that denoted absolute straightforwardness; while a somewhat low forehead suggested that, if he had to depend upon his brain-power, he would hardly achieve any marked worldly success. The girl was of a far more striking individuality.

A brunette, with black eyes that seemed to look into one's soul, a mass of brown hair, a slightly up-tilted nose that invited one to make love to her, a thin straight mouth that should have warned one to think twice before doing so, a

determined little chin set upon a long and beautifully shaped neck, she at once struck me as altogether out of the common, and probably endowed with an adventurous temperament. She appeared to have set off in a hurry, for instead of an appropriate cycling costume, she was wearing an elaborate confection of muslin and lace, which was hooked up with safety-pins to keep it from being entangled in the machine.

"Forgive our unconventional intrusion, Sir John Carruthers," said the man as they approached and dismounted; but before he could finish his sentence his companion dashed into the incipient conversation.

"Oh, Sir John," she said, "I am so frightened! I am in such terror that I don't know what I am doing! You must save me!"

"I am sure I shall only be too delighted to be of any use," I replied, as the young lady ceased for a moment for want of breath. "But now, take my advice, and come and dispose of the bikes against the conservatory. That's right. Now we can start fair. But first, I must prescribe a little refreshment. A glass of wine will do you good after your long ride. I can see you have lost no time on your journey.

"Tom," I said to the boy who was mowing the lawn, "tell

William to bring out some sherry and cigarettes. You can leave off doing the lawn for the present, and go and weed the drive by the gate. Now," I continued to my visitors, "we will hear all about the matter when we are rested a bit. Meanwhile, if you will introduce yourself and the lady," I said to her companion, "we shall be in a better position to proceed."

"My name is Herbert Pixley," he replied, "and the lady is Miss Edith Le Marchant, and we are engaged to be married."

I bowed by way of congratulating them both on their prospective union. William brought out what my old friend Vincent of Bombay used to call "sundry comforts," and I dispensed sherry and cigarettes.

"Now," I said, "Miss Le Marchant, will you tell me what has happened? I am extremely anxious to hear what it is all about, though at the same time I cannot imagine what I am in a position to do to help you. I have been of use to a few folk in India, but in this country I am quite out of it. Talking of India, may I say that I am much interested in your very unusual brooch? The gold is obviously Indian pure metal without alloy; but the subject is one that is never used for a work of

art in the East. The pig is an absolutely English one, of the long Berkshire breed. Indian pigs are rather more like wild boars."

"Look here, Sir John," said Miss Le Marchant, "and then we shall get at it. Just look at this picture of a pig and let us know what you think of that. Is there any connection with this picture of the pig and my brooch?"

Miss Le Marchant handed me a piece of paper with a carefully-drawn pen-and-ink sketch of a pig. The delineation was identical with the one that formed her brooch. But the paper contained more than the representation of the animal that is deemed so unclean in the East. In the right upper corner was the letter O, and in the left corner the letter M, while at the foot was the following cypher:

C	M	B	N	A	V	B	S	P	H	E	U	X	V	R
a	m	v	b	r	c	p	r	l	h	s	j	m	v	p
L	2	3	W	N	C	P	C	L	L	H	1	5	O	R
q	i	d	o	m	r	w	k	a	h	j	m	d	e	g
D	Q	F	E	T	S	J	L	V	T	G	K	H	Y	O

I felt my senses quickening as they had done of old at the prospect of a mystery to be unravelled, and I own that I was absolutely and entirely puzzled.

"Well," said Miss Le Marchant, "can you make anything of it? What am I to do?"

"The puzzle is a fascinating one." I replied; "but I am entirely in the dark without a full knowledge of the data. Will you tell me how you got the brooch and the picture, and why you are in terror of your life?"

"I am afraid I always begin in the middle," said the girl; "but I will try to give you a connected narrative of what has happened. The worst is that I know so little about it myself, and what I do know I have only learnt to-day. I have never known my parents. Ever since I can remember I have lived in America, where I was brought up by some people with whom I had been placed by my father. All that they ever told me about him was that he had lived in India and that this gold brooch had been given to me by him. A few months ago I met Mr. Pixley, who was travelling in the States, and we became engaged. It was then arranged that I should come to England and live with an old maiden aunt, Miss Letitia Hill, who had a house near Godalming.

"I had, of course, never seen her; but she used occasionally to write to me. Oh, that awful voyage across the Atlantic, Sir John! I thought that nothing in the world could exceed the

horrors of sea-sickness, but now I have experienced worse! I should tell you that Herbert's place is not far from Godalming, being just the other side of Guildford.

"Well, to-day, my aunt and I were having lunch. She always likes lunch very early. In the middle of the meal the servant brought in the post, and on opening an envelope directed to myself in a handwriting that was quite strange to me, I found the pig and the hieroglyphics that I have shown you. It struck me only as something very funny, and I passed it to my aunt for her to see. But no sooner had the old lady set eyes on it than she turned deadly white, and I thought she would have fainted.

"It was a strange and awful story that she had to tell me. She told me that my father had been a planter in India, in a place called Tarapore. He had been very fairly successful, but he finally returned home suddenly with three young children—myself and two brothers. He was already a widower. He had been of a cheery disposition, but all this was now entirely changed. He was so irritable and nervous that it was clear that some fearful weight lay upon him. He proceeded at once to dispose of his three

children at separate places with a distant relatives and acquaintances—myself, as I have said, being shipped to America.

"Well, this is the awful thing. Within a year my father and my two brothers absolutely disappeared in the most mysterious way. Not a sign of them was ever seen again. It can only be supposed that I escaped because I was far away in a foreign country. Oh, I can hardly go on; it is so frightful. In each case before their disappearances my father and my brothers received in succession three pictures of a pig, just like this one, sometimes by post, and sometimes in inexplicable ways. It can only be presumed that my father and brothers have been murdered, though why or by whom it is impossible to say. And now my turn is to come! It is too appalling! What am I to do, Sir John?"

"I feel stupefied, Sir John," said Pixley, "and utterly at a loss as to what to do. We put ourselves in your hands."

"Be assured of my utmost efforts," I responded. "Of all the mysterious cases that I have known this is the most extraordinary. I can say nothing at present to throw light upon it. I must think it out, but I sadly want more data. Meanwhile, it

would not appear that you are in any immediate danger, as if the original programme is adhered to you are to receive two more drawings of a pig before any attempt is made upon you. However, you would certainly be well advised not to go out without an escort. Doubtless Mr. Pixley will not find it disagreeable to accompany you. Now come and have a look at my dahlias, and see if you can give me any tips for improving my selection."

We wandered about the garden, and had a charming talk about my favourite flowers, and all kinds of subjects. Pixley turned out to be quite an authority on dahlias, and his *fiancee* rattled on about one thing after another, quite forgetting for the moment her critical situation.

She was soon to be reminded of it. When a move was made for the bicycles the back wheel of her machine was found to be quite flat. I instinctively opened the bag to get at the repairing outfit, when I found therein a piece of paper which, unfolded, bore the representation of a pig. I had the same mysterious cypher below; but, apart from this, there were certain variations in the document. In the upper right-hand corner were the letters M A, and in the left corner N E, while in the

right-hand lower corner was a diminutive but vigorous sketch of a Buddhist shrine. Now I had some more data. Now I might get on to the track.

"Good heavens. Sir John!" said Miss Le Marchant, as she stared at the paper in my hand. "Another of these hateful pigs, and so soon! Oh, how frightful! What am I to do?" and the poor girl, plucky as she was, burst into tears.

Pixley was the first to speak.

"What an extraordinary thing," he said, "that the beastly picture should have been found in the bag! How on earth did it get there?"

"It is just as well that we did find it," I said. "There is nothing like knowing exactly how we stand. I must have time to think it out. Take Miss Le Marchant home now, leave her safely in her aunt's house, and make her promise not to leave it till after breakfast to-morrow, when you will call for her and escort her to me again."

"By the by," said the young lady as she was taking leave, "Herbert and I are going out golfing to-morrow afternoon, and we are booked for a dance to-morrow night at the Thornhills'. They live at Weston Hall, you know. You don't suppose that the pig people will go for me at the links or the ball? I should be quite safe, shouldn't

I, if Herbert escorts me each way?"

"I shall be at the dance myself, Miss Le Marchant," I replied, "and I think that Mr. Pixley and I ought to be sufficient protection."

With many promises to be most discreet and heedful she departed, taking Pixley in her charge, it struck me, rather than placing herself under his protection.

The next morning my visitors turned up in due course. Miss Le Marchant had time found leisure to don a suitable bicycling costume, and very charming she looked in her neat coat and skirt.

"No more pigs, Miss Le Marchant?" I asked as she sprang lightly from her bicycle.

"Not a single one," she said. "After a good night's rest I feel as if it were all a hideous dream. Tell me, it is not true that there is a sentence of death hanging over me!"

"I can tell you that I have every reasonable anticipation of preventing the accomplishment of any so untoward a design. But the matter is a deep one, and you must place yourselves unreservedly under my orders. This is the only stipulation that I make before I proceed further in the matter. You must see, Mr. Pixley, the absolute necessity of this condition. Without it

I can undertake no responsibility."

They both agreed at once to my terms, so I continued my little address.

"That's all right," I said. "As you have, Miss Le Marchant, with Mr. Pixley's concurrence, put yourself in my hands, I will now, for my part, fill up some of the gaps in your narrative. The whole I cannot unfold to you now, if only to be perfectly frank with you, because I have yet something to learn myself. Now let us glance at these two pictures of the unclean animal. The first one has on the upper corners the letters O and M. They certainly are not there for nothing; but, taken alone, their meaning was beyond me to evolve.

"But look at the second picture. On the corresponding corners are the letters M A and N E. What do they stand for? 'Master of Arts' and 'North East'? No; something more abstruse than this. The true interpretation flashed upon me in a moment. Placed in proper juxtaposition, we can frame two words from these letters—not in English, it is true, but in terms familiar to only one acquainted with the literature of the East. Look at this, 'Om Mane.' You do not appreciate the force of my discovery? This is the first part of the cardinal

sign of the Buddhist religion, which in full runs, 'Om Mane Padmi Om.' Now look at the lower right-hand corner of the second picture. I, who know the East, recognise in this finger-nail illustration a Buddhist monastery. This strengthens my deciphering of the letters in the upper corners. And now! how to go a step further?

"Here is an extract from my old Indian note-book referring to a time about twenty years ago: 'Attention has been called in several quarters to a revial of Buddhism in Indian districts. Buddhist priests have come from Ceylon and Burmah, and their doctrine appears to be spreading amongst a certain section of the population. These missionaries have especially turned their attention to the restoration of old Buddhist shrines, caves, and monasteries. Some of these, which dated from many centuries back, but which still remained substantially intact, were found to be used as store-houses for agricultural stock, for cow-sheds, and even for the breeding of swine. By various means a number of these have been cleared of their unsuitable tenantry, and in more than one instance extraordinary misfortunes have fallen upon the recent occupants, some being so plagued that they

have been driven to leave their districts.'

"Now we arrive at a further step. Your father, Miss Le Marchant, you say, had to suddenly leave India. You wear as a brooch a very remarkable moulding of a pig, given by him to you as a young child. We have unmistakable signs of the most bitter enmity against him and his on the part of a society which sends premonitory missives of death, or, at all events, of disappearance, which betokens death, embellished with drawings of pigs. Further, these productions bear portions of the most mystical of Buddhist religious teachings; and the last picture has the delineation of a Buddhist monastery. Now we evolve with absolute logic the following history. Your father, a planter, finds that certain Buddhist remains situated on his estate are suitable for the rearing of pigs. He imports some of the long Berkshire variety. He is so interested in his hobby that he has a gold brooch made for his only daughter in the similitude of one of these animals.

"He must have been unusually keen upon his speculation to have been led to think of this little design. The Buddhist reformers come round, and urge him to relinquish his claim to their sacred spot. He flatly

refuses, upon which they swear to him with all the terrors of their creed that neither he nor his children shall escape their revenge. He knows the East, and flies the country. But this is the enemies' opportunity. Forbidden by their religion to take life, they can easily limit the application of the rule to their own country and to their own handiwork. In England death, especially if caused through an agent, would cease to be a sin. Buddhist priests have vast sums of money, and a marvelously powerful organisation at their disposal. They soon compassed the death of your father and of your brothers. America was beyond their reach, and you have fortunately escaped for years.

"But they have never ceased to be on the look-out for you, and now they have found you. In the former cases they were good enough to give three warnings in the shape of pig-pictures. As yet you have had only two, and presumably there is still one to come before any action is taken. Any such action we have now to circumvent, and I venture to think that it is in my power to bring the whole conspiracy to light. I can tell you no more at present. You must trust in me. Until the ball, I shall be immensely busy this evening

with your case. Telegrams will be flying about, and I must run up to town to work out some points myself. Meanwhile, be most discreet. I hope you will enjoy your golf."

I spent a very busy and interesting day, and my dinner had to be a very hasty repast to enable me to be in time for the ball. I must say it was a magnificent show. My host and hostess were most charming, and, though new acquaintances, greeted me as if I were an old friend. Miss Le Marchant had not yet appeared when I arrived, and I stood about waiting for a word with her when she came. She was amongst the latest of the guests; but when at last a brougham drove up, and she and Pixley alighted, I thought that she was certainly the most striking. Her costume was of a delicate cream colour, set off only by scarlet roses in her hair and her corsage. I noticed as I approached her that she looked pale and agitated, and yet a trifle defiant.

"Oh, Sir John," she said, as I was about to remind her of our dance, "isn't it crushing? Look here, the third pig! It was in the little bag that is on the carriage door. I had put my handkerchief in it, and on taking it out this hateful thing came with it. But I don't care! Let them do

what they like!" she continued with increasing animation. "I have come here to enjoy myself and I am just going to. All right, Sir John, you needn't fear that I shall forget our dance."

I looked at the paper that she left in my hands as she hastened to the cloak-room. It differed from the others only in having, as I expected, the letters P A D in the left upper corner and M I in the right, while the lower corners had respectively O and M. The final warning had been received. But the fortitude of the girl was sublime; whatever mental effort it cost her to do so she maintained an appearance of unimpaired gaiety. There was no doubt as to who was the *belle* of the ball-room. I stood in the intervals between my own dances watching her with intense fascination.

"Well, you are a plucky one, Miss Le Marchant," I said, as the time came for me to claim my dance with her. "How do you manage it?"

"Oh, I don't exactly know," she replied; "but this may be my last dance or my last anything else, and I am determined that they shall not spoil the evening."

She could just dance. In fact, it was more than dancing; it was floating rather on wings than on feet. It was with a feeling of

intoxication that I was whirled round with her to the strains of "Sourire d' Avril."

"Very sorry to interrupt you," said a voice which I perceived was that of my host, "but I am a bearer of bad news. Miss Hill has been suddenly taken ill, and the doctor thinks that she is dying. Miss Le Marchant has been sent for to return home instantly. A man has come for her in a hansom."

Action was imperative. Miss Le Marchant dashed into the cloak-room for her wrap, while I looked around for Pixley. He was nowhere to be seen, and it was impossible for my late partner to go alone. There was only one thing to do.

"I accompany you," I said.

Miss Le Marchant got into the hansom. I was pushing in her flowing mantle after her, preparatory to getting in myself, when in a moment the driver brought down his whip upon the horse, which I could see was a particularly spirited one, and off the vehicle dashed!

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated. "The third pig!"

"The third what?" exclaimed my host, in amazement at the dramatic incident.

"What has happened, Sir John?" said Pixley, who rushed towards us at that moment. "Has Miss Le Marchant gone?"

"She is gone," I replied.

"The third pig has done its work. I cannot explain now, Thornhill; Pixley understands. The only thing is to follow instantly."

But we could not follow instantly. The horses had been unharnessed from the carriages that had brought the guests; and ten minutes elapsed, which to us seemed hours, before a mail phaeton, with a fine pair of horses, turned up. I leaped on the box, seized the reins, and with Pixley at my side, started in pursuit of the hansom. It was a bright moonlight night, and we could see as well as if it were day.

"How do you know which way she has been taken?" asked Pixley.

"I have very good reason to guess where she has been taken, and why," I responded. "See," I said, as I drew up for a moment at four cross roads, "Miss Le Marchant has kept her head. Look at that glove on the road in front of us. On we go."

At another turning her second glove showed us the way to take.

"I thought so. I felt sure of it," I said, as a fragment of her exquisite lace fan met our eyes when we turned from a cross-country lane on to the main road to Red Hill. "We have a long journey before us. England was not safe enough. I

hope you are a good sailor, Pixley, for we have to cross the Channel. I fear Miss Le Marchant will suffer."

It was half-past two when we reached Red Hill, and the Newhaven train had left. Yes, a sleepy porter told us in answer to our inquiries, a lady in a long cloak had arrived in a hansom just before the departure of the train. She was met by an old lady and a middle-aged man, whose appearance he had not noticed, and had been hustled, apparently in a half-dazed condition, into a first-class compartment that was labelled reserved.

It was in vain that Pixley asked for a special engine, and explained that money was no object to him. The station-master was obdurate. Pixley came out well from the trying ordeal of enforced delay. He displayed marvellous patience and self-restraint. He only asked me one question.

"What about Miss Hill? Is the report about her illness a make-up?"

"I fancy that it is a ruse," I replied.

At last the morning dawned. The moon had long since sunk. The station awoke. A train crawled in. We reached Newhaven at last, after stopping at every station, and went on board the steamer. The passage

was indeed a stormy one, and I reflected on the sufferings that the unfortunate Miss Le Marchant must have endured. But there is an end to all things, and we finally disembarked at the picturesque town of Dieppe.

"Hôtel d'Angleterre," I said to the driver of the *fiarce* which I selected; "five franes if you get us there sharp."

The Jehu flogged his wretched horse, and we were soon at the old-fashioned hostelry which I had named. To Pixley's unspeakable amazement we perceived at the entrance Miss Letitia Hill in close proximity to an elderly man.

"Oh, Miss Hill!" he shouted, "what does all this mean? Are we in time? Is Edith safe? Where is she?"

"Edith safe!" said Miss Hill. "I should think she was safe! A good deal safer than she deserves to be—She and her pig-pictures, and taking my name in vain! You are lucky to have been able to know the minx in time, when you can still break off the engagement. She is a pretty good wreck from sea-sickness, otherwise she is safe."

It was cruel to torture Pixley longer.

"Go and get Miss Le Marchant if she can possibly come," I said to Miss Hill, and she departed to do my bidding.

"Meanwhile, Pixley," I said, "let me introduce you to Mr. Le Marchant, the young lady's father, who you see is still alive!"

"Am I in a lunatic asylum?" asked Pixley, as he mechanically shook hands with his projective father-in-law, "or is there any sense in this business?"

"You shall learn all about it at once," I replied, as a very pallid young lady, who wore a strangely conscious and guilty expression, entered the room. I put Miss Le Marchant into a comfortable chair, and sympathised with her for her sufferings.

"That's all right, Sir John," she said. "I shall get over my misery in time, though I do feel very bad. But how did you find me out?"

"All right, Miss Le Marchant, you shall hear all about it. In the first place, long experience has taught me to suspect every narrative. I am a hopeless sceptic. Now, you gave the whole show away in two ways, though I did not exactly jump at the truth at first. In the first place, there was the bicycle incident. I observed you fumbling with the machine, which you insisted upon putting down yourself, delcining my offer of assistance. I realised afterwards that you had deliberately let

the air out, with the intention that the bag should be opened. Then there was the cypher. Why should the missive contain a cypher of which the recipient had not the key? There was no sense in it at all. Then there has never been a cypher invented which cannot be solved by a proficient in the art. But your cypher would yield to no system of treatment. In other words, it was no cypher at all.

"So I proceeded to test your statements, of which about the only I have found to be unreservedly correct. That was the effect of a sea voyage upon you. When you were at the golf-links I paid a little visit to Miss Letitia Hill. I learnt from this good lady, who is a real brick, and has played the game splendidly, that you were a regular madcap, and were also engrossed in detective stories. You had even done me the honour of partaking the earlier 'Leaves from My Notebook' which had already been published, and you thought it would be a fine joke to test your wits against mine. It is true that your father had kept pigs in India, and you had certainly studied Buddhism. Your father and you had lived apart; but his disappearance, as that of your brothers, was a product of your fertile imagination.

"The practical joke that you

evoked was exceedingly ingenious, and I hope you will do me the credit of admitting that I elaborated your rough sketch with some degree of skill. You thought that I was beautifully taken in all the time, didn't you? And now, Miss Le Marchant, comes the moral. You are engaged to this young man, and will doubtless make him an excellent wife; but your aunt and I considered that you would be benefitted by a very drastic lesson. So I had you shipped away in a hansom and carried across the Channel."

"Herbert," said Miss Le Marchant, "I give you full permission to break off your engagement to me."

Pixley, whose countenance had expressed every shade of amazement, burst into laughter.

"Great Scott!" he gasped, "this is the rummiest show! So all the pig business was a made-up yarn? Splendid! splendid! I have never had such an excitement in my life. Break off our engagement? Not quite, though I admit that Sir John and your aunt had a right to take a rise out of you after the little game you had played on everyone."

All's well that ends well. Pixley and his wife became my most intimate friends, and were frequent visitors at my house.

A New RICK HARPER Adventure



The Disappearing Trucks

The big hood said, "I got news for you, fuzz. Get outa town. Today. On your own power. Or—" He patted a shoulder holster—Permanent. Feet first."

by DAVID MAZROFF



WILLIAM HURLEY, president of the National Armored Car Service Corporation, was exactly what his nickname—"Big Bill"—implied, a big man physically and as a business executive. Still in his early thirties, he had built up a service that was cutting deeply into the major armored truck industry.

At the moment, however, he was facing complete ruin. He leaned back in the swivel chair and regarded Rick Harper appraisingly.

"I sent for you, Mr. Harper,

because I was told you were a man of unusual talents as a private investigator. I checked you out, naturally, and I found that your reputation matches your achievements. I'm satisfied with your track record."

"Thanks," Harper replied laconically. "I've been lucky in a few instances." He adjusted his lithe six-foot frame in the chair on the other side of the desk.

Hurley let a small smile cross his ruddy features. "I'll overlook that statement as an expression of justifiable mod-

esty. However, you don't strike me as a man suffering from a severe case of it."

Harper grinned. "Okay, Mr. Hurley, I'll lay it on the line: What have I got to be modest about? Every case the police can't solve is usually thrown to the FBI, State Police, or private investigators. Not the general run of private eyes but those a cut above, the tough, hard-nosed sleuths. I pride myself on being in that category."

"You were with the FBI?"

"Yes, for about a year."

"And with the CIA?"

"About the same length of time. Before you ask me why I left both services I'll tell you. I like being my own boss, choose my own assignments." He looked around the sumptuous office. "You've got a pretty good track record yourself. I checked you out too before I left San Francisco."

Hurley nodded. "I figured you would."

"Okay, Mr. Hurley, you sent for me. You think I can help you?"

"Two of my armored trucks have been held up on the same highway. Something like five million dollars was taken from both trucks. Minutes later, or as soon as the drivers could get to a phone, the police, city, county, and state, set up roadblocks. Minutes later, Mr.

Harper, a matter of five minutes at the outset, and the armored trucks disappeared! No trace of them on any road. It's the damnedest thing I've ever run across. We know this much, that an organized gang, highly efficient, clever, is operating against us."

"Any leads at all?"

"None. Not a clue. The bandits wore disguises."

"What time of day did the robberies take place?"

"Early in the morning, around six o'clock. Our main business is the delivery of payrolls. A lot of the plants we service open early for delivery of the cash, so the payroll can be made up in time for distribution to the employees at lunch time. It's in the union contract."

Harper was thoughtful. "Well, there seems to be several avenues open. An inside job, someone in your counting room, a driver, dispatcher, or other employee. You haven't discounted that, have you?"

"I discount nothing. You said there were several avenues to consider. What are the others?"

"An employee in one of the plants you service, a union member, or just someone who may have seen your trucks delivering the money."

"It's all possible."

"One more question, a rather pertinent one. How do the heistmen prevail upon your men to open up the truck?"

"First, they block the road. That stops the truck. Next, they point two bazookas and threaten the men in the truck with blowing it up, money and all."

"I'm familiar with what a bazooka can do. You've answered my question. Now, as I see it, the armored truck is held up, the guards disarmed, and ordered to walk away, and then the truck is driven off, and—poof!" He clapped his hands. "A bit of magic and the truck disappears. Am I correct?"

"That's it. No van into which the truck may have been loaded, no helicopter, no nothing!"

Harper raised a black eyebrow. "Intriguing."

"Yes, isn't it?" Hurley snapped. "Mr. Harper, the insurance people are on my neck. Paying out five million dollars against losses in two robberies is enough to upset Lloyds of London. My rates have been increased thirty per cent. I've also been threatened with cancellation of my policies. If that happens, I'm out of business. I could never sustain the loss of millions of dollars in a robbery. If the insurance

people cancel me out, I'm finished. That's why I sent for you."

Harper leaned back in his seat, his tanned features gravely thoughtful. "Mr. Hurley, I like responsibility as much as I like a tough case, but you're really putting me on the spot. If I'm not able to break this case you're out of business, because as I see it, there's going to be another attack on one of your trucks."

"I'm aware of it. My reasoning tells me this is a big gang, as many as a dozen or more men in it. Their expenses have to be high—payoffs, God knows to whom, even to every branch of police authority. There has been a few rogue agents in the FBI, too, hasn't there?"

"Not to my knowledge. Agents are extremely zealous of the FBI's reputation as an honest organization. A crooked agent would be turned in by every other agent in the department and prosecuted to the hilt. So far as the others are concerned, city and state police and sheriffs, well, that's another story."

"You feel then that there may be cops or sheriffs in on this?"

"Possibly. There's no way of knowing."

"Will you take the case, Mr. Harper?"

Harper sensed the tension beneath Hurley's somewhat calm exterior. The calmness was all surface. The man was deeply concerned, as he ought to be. Harper felt that he just might be running into a hornet's nest of violence. The hoods involved in the robberies were thorough professionals, connected, perhaps, with the Capone Syndicate, which was still very much alive and active despite the fact that Capone was dead for a quarter century. Fighting those guys would be like being tossed into a cage with a dozen hungry tigers. But that's what the game was all about. It was his game, and now he had to take his turn at bat or admit he was out of his league.

"Okay, Mr. Hurley," he said, "I'll take it."

Hurley smiled broadly. "Good, good, Mr. Harper. Now, about your fee, over and above expenses, of course. How much?"

"Does that include the recovery of the five million dollars?"

"If you can accomplish that, it will be frosting on the cake. What I am interested in mostly is to stop the attacks on my trucks and bring these bastards to justice. Name your fee."

"Suppose we put this on a

daily basis. Two hundred dollars a day, over and above expenses. Give me thirty days. If I break the case by then my fee will be twenty thousand dollars on top of the daily stipend. If I don't, and admit to you that I can't, all you'll pay me is the daily stipend."

"Agreed. I'll have my secretary type out a memo of agreement. Will you want a retainer?"

"Nope. I'll bill you for the expenses along with the daily charges when I solve the case."

Hurley pressed a button on an intercom on his desk. "Bess, come into my office. Bring your notebook."

A few moments later, a rather tall, comely woman came into the office. She had the cool, efficient, mature look of the top-notch executive secretary.

"My personal secretary, Mr. Harper. Bess Webster. Bess, this is Mr. Rick Harper, a private investigator. I've engaged him to look into the robberies of our trucks."

Bess Webster nodded to Harper. "I've heard of you, Mr. Harper. You have quite a reputation?"

Harper grinned. "That has an ominous ring to it. I'm known for many things."

Bess Webster smiled. "I'm aware of that too. You see, it



was I who checked you out, on Mr. Hurley's orders." She let the smile linger on her face. "Thirty years old, Irish-Indian, graduate of MIT with a master's degree in the sciences, Air Force captain in Viet Nam, football hero, especially adept in judo and karate, former agent of the FBI and an undercover agent for the CIA. Also, a lady's man and a man who can hold his liquor."

Hurley grinned. "That's close. What size shirt?"

She grinned back. "I know that too."

Hurley said, "Bess was formerly a research editor for several major magazines. She knows how to get information."

"I can see that," Harper

acknowledged. "I'll keep that in mind."

"Bess," Hurley said, "type out a memo of agreement between Mr. Harper and the company." He gave her the information. "This is top secret. I want none of this leaked out to anyone, not even to our accountants until afterward."

"I understand, Mr. Hurley."

"Good. Bring it in when you've finished."

Harper spent another hour with Hurley going over the details of the robberies. Hurley gave him the names of the drivers and guards of both trucks. They were clean-up to that point, anyway. Hurley also furnished him with the exact locations of both heists which took place about thirty miles from Chicago. The road where the trucks were halted wound through wooded hills and rolling prairies past Lemont, The Sag, Willow Springs, and Summit, and came into Chicago by Archer Road.

"The trucks were held up between The Sag and Willow Springs," Hurley said. "That's a pretty lonely spot at that time of the morning. Very few vehicular traffic, and no pedestrian traffic at all."

"I see. Very well, Mr. Hurley. I've got all the information I need. If you don't hear from me in the next

several days or a week, don't worry about it. I'll report to you when I have something to say. Not before."

"I understand." Hurley rose, extended his hand. "I'm grateful to you, Mr. Harper. And very much relieved." "That's good enough for me."

RICK HARPER rented a car and drove out to Joliet early the next morning. He arrived in Joliet at five-thirty and started back toward Chicago, traversing the same road given him by Hurley. The late October moon was full. Fields of stubble and shocked corn glimmered with frost. The woods, darkly gorgeous in autumn colors muttered eerily in the cold wind, and dead leaves rustled along the road. Just to the west, the serrated mud embankments, marking the course of the drainage canal, loomed black against the silver dimness of the sky like a weird mountain range. As Hurley had said, it was a lonely spot.

Harper drove slowly through The Sag and its marshy lowlands. The village was asleep, its houses dark, its streets silent. Halfway between The Sag and Willow Springs, Harper saw several rows of mobile homes set up in a court. They were dark too. He drove past them, and then, on second

thought, made a U-turn and drove back, stopped on the shoulder and surveyed the court and its row upon row of mobile homes. A curious thought struck him.

"A fantastic idea," he said aloud. "Too damned fantastic!" He shrugged. "Then again, why not?" He studied the court for several minutes more then turned the car and drove back to Chicago.

In front of the Congress Hotel on Michigan Boulevard, where he had checked in the day before, he told the doorman to park the car. "I won't need it for a while."

"Very good, sir. Just call me when you want it and I'll have it right here for you. My name's Devlin, sir. Mike Devlin."

"Mike Devlin, eh? Fighter?"

The doorman grinned. "Yes, sir. Fought the best of them in my day."

"Okay, Mike." Harper nodded and turned into the lobby, walked briskly to the elevator, went up to the fifth floor and let himself into the room.

The two big guys were seated in chairs by the broad window. They were grim visaged, burly. They sat there and stared hard at Harper.

"Do I have the wrong room, gentlemen?" Harper asked evenly.

"Pull up a chair, Harper,"

the shorter of the two said, "pull up a chair right there." He pointed to a spot about five feet from where he sat. "We're going to have a talk. Sociable, if you cooperate. Otherwise, we're going to pin your ears back and take a few of your teeth."

Harper grinned. "That's a very poor start toward a sociable conversation. Shall I ring for tea?"

"Pull up a chair and sit down, wise guy. We're in no mood for comedy."

Harper shrugged. "Why not? I'm a little tired." He pulled up a chair, turned it so the back faced the two men and sat down in a straddling position. "Now, what can I do for you gentlemen?"

The taller of the two snapped, "You can get the hell outta town and back to San Francisco, see? We don't need any damn gumshoes in Chicago."

Harper grinned, tauntingly. "Suppose I say that I like this town? I came in to have a little fun, look over the city, see a few shows. Why not?"

"Cut the crap, Harper! You didn't come to Chi to see no shows. You blew in yesterday. This morning real early you went out in a rented car and came back three, four hours later. That kind of action don't

spell what you're telling us, see?"

"No?" Harper retorted in that same taunting tone. "What then?"

The big guy's ugly mouth twisted. He wrenched himself around and spat at Harper's feet. "I said we don't want no crap outta you, you bastard!" He pointed a forefinger at Harper. "Get outta town! Today!"

Harper watched both men intently for any overt move, all his nerves tensed for action. "I don't like being run out of town, by you or anyone else. I don't like having goons spitting at me." He balanced his weight on his toes and rose a little from his seat.

The big guy leaped up. "You dumb bastard. I'll kick your guts outta—" It was as far as he got.

Harper sprang from his chair and hurled it with all the force he could muster at the big guy's head. The heavy piece of furniture hit the hood full in the face and he fell over backward and sprawled over his own chair, stunned and temporarily immobilized.

The shorter hood went for his gun in a shoulder holster under his left arm but Harper was on top of him. He smashed two punches to the hood's jaw and then hit him a judo chop.

across the neck. The hood fell back against the wall and then slowly collapsed to the floor. Harper then leaped toward the bigger hood, who was still dazed. He slugged him on the jaw with two hard rights, then let him fall to the floor.

He made a quick decision then. He knew he could no longer stay in the hotel. The mob hadn't wasted a minute zeroing in on him. He had to hand it to them. They had one helluva spy system.

His mind raced. Who was the informer? Bess Webster? He shook his head. She wouldn't do a thing like that. Who could possibly have known he had been hired by Hurley and that he was in town? He glanced quickly at the two unconscious hoods. They would be coming around soon. He had to get out, and fast. He frisked both men, removed their guns, took out the shells and tossed them on the bed. He picked up the phone then and asked for Mike Devlin the doorman.

"Mike? Mr. Harper. Get my car. Right away. Got it?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Harper. Right away."

Harper called the cashier and asked her to prepare his bill. "I'm checking out. I'll be down in a few minutes. Will you please have my bill ready? I'm in a hurry."

"Surely, Mr. Harper. It will be ready."

He picked up his bag, looked around the room in a quick study, went out. He paid his bill and walked out into the street. His car was already there. He handed Devlin a bill.

"Something come up, Mr. Harper?" Mike asked.

"Yes. Something important. Have to leave town." He gave Mike Devlin a sharp look. "Could be," he thought. Yet, how the hell would Mike know. He got into his car, drove south for a block, made a right turn, drove to Clark Street and turned north.

As he drove, he sensed the inevitable development of danger to himself, danger and catastrophe. The sharp fragments of impending disaster pierced his nerves like so many pieces of slivered steel honed to scalpel-edged keeness. The mob would be looking for him, searching every crevice and corner of the city until they found him. Then, there would be no more talk. Only a quick volley of pistol shots, or bursts from a machine-gun.

He drove through the heavy traffic, his mind quickened to the darkened peril that confronted him. He had to find a hotel, register under an assumed name. A small hotel or rooming house would be the thing. He

came to Addison Avenue, turned west. Several blocks farther he saw a sign on a clean, frame house. There was a neat lawn, brown and faded green now under autumn's wear. The sign said, *Rooms*.

He parked around the corner, got out and approached the house, mounted the stairs and rang the bell. A woman in her late fifties, pleasant-faced, buxom, the motherly type, opened the door.

"Yes?" the woman said in answer to his ring. "May I help you?"

"I'm looking for a room. A front room, if you have one."

"Yes. I have a room on the second floor. You intend to stay a while?"

"About a month."

"I see. Are you a salesman?"

He smiled. "No. I'm doing some research work. Development of industrial areas. I'll be out a great deal."

"Oh. Well, that's all right. I'm sure you won't disturb anyone. Would you like to see the room?"

"If you will, please."

"Come in, Mr. —"

"Hammond. Russell Hammond."

"This way, Mr. Hammond." She led him up the stairs to the second floor and to a large, clean room overlooking the street.

"This is fine. I'll take it. How much is it?"

"Fifteen dollars a week."

"That's fine. I'll pay for a month." He counted out the money, handed it to her.

She smiled. "Thank you, Mr. Hammond. I'll give you a key to the front door. I keep that locked at all times. There have been so many unpleasant things lately. It isn't safe to go out anymore."

"Yes, I know. Thank you, Mrs. —"

"Swanson. You may call me Emily, Mr. Hammond."

"Thank you, Emily. I'll get my bag later. It's in my car."

"When you come down, I'll have your key for you, and a key for this room." She went out and closed the door.

Harper went to the window and stood there studying the street. His mind went over every detail of the incidents that had occurred since he got off the plane at O'Hare. It seemed incredible to him that the mob could have found out so quickly that he was coming into the town, or for the purpose for which he had been engaged, or was about to be engaged. Yet there it was.

He thought about the whole thing for a long time. It struck him that there was more to the robberies than was apparent. He was certain that the Syndicate

wanted to destroy the National Armored Car Service under Hurley, pick up the pieces, reorganize it, and take over. Then, when it was reestablished, fully insured, they would wait for the big one, the ten or fifteen million dollar score, set it up and take it. If National fell apart after that, it wouldn't matter.

National was a clay pigeon for the mob, as Harper saw it. And, no doubt, as the Syndicate had discovered. Basically, the operational system was all wrong. There were too many wide pits, too many margins for error, and so vulnerable to attack not only of the trucks but of the counting room itself. The strange part of it was that up to now the counting room, with its millions of dollars lying around invitingly, had not been heisted.

The Syndicate, it seemed, had decided on doing it piecemeal, in a sort of war of attrition, and to create a reputation of the company as an irresponsible, careless agency under poor management. Despite the usual precautions of the ADT service and the silent alarm to police headquarters, a clever gang, like the one that robbed Brinks in Boston, could successfully pull off a heist. That, however, would not have established National as a secur-

ity risk. A series of robberies would. Someone in the Syndicate had to figure that one out. It was as clever, adroit, and resourceful as any that had ever been invented.

What bothered Harper most was how the Syndicate knew he was to be engaged. Only Hurley and Bess Webster knew that. He decided he had to talk with Bess Webster.

He walked out to his car, got his bag and brought it in. Mrs. Swanson met him in the hall.

"Here are your keys, Mr. Hammond, to your room and the front door." She smiled. "I hope you'll be comfortable."

"I'm sure of it." He went up, put the bag in his room and came back down. He peered out the door into the street. All clear. He went out, walked to the corner and stopped. A cop was leaning against his car. "The bastards!" he muttered aloud. "They don't miss a trick." He strolled leisurely to the car. The cop looked up.

"Hiyah, Officer. Nice day. A little windy but nice."

"You own this car, Mister?"

"I rented it. Anything wrong?"

"Let's see your receipt," the cop said harshly.

"What's wrong?" Harper asked again, argumentatively.

"Look, Mister, I said I wanted to see your receipt!"

"And I asked you what was wrong!"

"This car is reported stolen. You got a receipt?" The cop said. "Show it!"

Harper fished in his pocket, yanked out a billfold, dug out the receipt and held it out. The cop tried to take it but Harper yanked it back. "You can read it, can't you?" He held the receipt close to the cop's face.

"I'm reading it but it don't tell me a thing. You probably stole that too. I'm taking you in. Over there, in the black sedan."

"An unmarked car? You must be nuts. You're not taking me any place. For all I know, you're a phony cop. Get out of my way!"

The cop reached for his gun. Harper's right hand shot out and he hit the cop a sharp judo chop on the back of the neck. The cop dropped to the ground in a grotesque heap and Harper leaped into his car and drove off. At the rental agency he turned the car in.

RICK HARPER took a taxi to Hurley's office but had the driver leave him off a block before the building. He found Bess Webster in the ante office.

"Is Mr. Hurley in, Miss Webster?"

"No, Mr. Harper. He's gone for the day. He ~~LICENSER~~ didn't say

where he was going. That's unusual for him."

"Yes, I'm sure. Miss Webster
I want to ask you a few
questions."

"Of course."

"How long have you worked for Mr. Hurley?"

"About eight years." She was suddenly nervous and began to worry a small pearl button on her white blouse, turning it round and round.

"Miss Webster, only Hurley and you knew I was coming into Chicago. Yet, two tough hoods, Syndicate guys, met me in my room at the hotel and invited me out of town, or else I'd like to know how they knew I was coming in or that Mr. Hurley contemplated engaging me."

She let a short laugh come from her throat. It was an unhappy sound. "Mr. Harper, this is the first time in my life I've had to answer for my honesty and integrity. That's what your question means, doesn't it?"

"Miss Webster, five million dollars in cash, hard cash, unmarked bills, easy to pass, has been stolen. I've been threatened by two tough hoods, and a little while ago by a cop who wanted to see my receipt for a rented car, and then wanted to take me to the station. That's what he said. I

assaulted the cop. That means I'm in a lot of trouble, legally. I suspect everyone at this moment, including Hurley."

Her face turned pale. "I don't mind telling you that I feel as if a lot of little lizards are crawling all over my flesh. I strongly resent your suspicions.

"You're not under suspicion, Miss Webster. But I have to satisfy myself that you're clean. Call it the process of elimination."

She pushed a tendril of hair from her forehead. "Yes, I suppose so. Did Mr. Hurley approve of this, your questioning me in this fashion?"

"Nope. I work without anyone's approval or permission once I take a case. It couldn't be any other way. If I had to wait for someone to approve of my actions I'd never solve anything."

"Well, I'm glad of that. I always felt Mr. Hurley had complete faith in me."

"I'm sure of it. What I want from you are straightforward answers."

"I don't know any other kind, Mr. Harper. Proceed, please."

"Thanks. Now, where do you keep the file of personal or confidential correspondence that Mr. Hurley dictates to you?"

"In that filing cabinet. It has

a special lock, as you can see."

"Where do you keep your notebook, the one you use to take down dictation from Mr. Hurley?"

"In this drawer." She pointed to the top righthand drawer of her desk.

"Is that drawer kept open?"

"Yes, it is. I keep nothing in it except my notebook, stationery, and odds and ends—pens, pencils, things like that."

"What system of shorthand do you use?"

"Gregg. Why do you ask that?"

"Suppose someone who could read Gregg took out your notebook, could they transcribe your notes? Read them?"

"Well, I think so. I use the standard system, a few shortcuts. You think someone did that?"

"Quite possible. May I see your notebook, the page of dictation you took for the letter to me?"

"Surely." She pulled open the drawer, took out a shorthand pad, flipped the pages, handed it to Harper. "That's it."

Harper studied the notes. "Excellent outlines. A first year shorthand student could transcribe them. I think this is how the mob got their information that Mr. Hurley was hiring me. Whoever broke into the office,

may have bribed the cleaning woman to allow them in, read your notes, or photographed them and then had someone transcribe them who could do it."

She shook her head in a troubled way. There was suddenly a burdensome look in her eyes. "I never thought of that. I didn't believe anyone would go that far."

"They're playing for high stakes, Miss Webster. They'll go as far as they have to, and that includes murder."

She put a hand to her throat. "I'm frightened, Mr. Harper, truly frightened."

"You don't have to be. They won't bother you. Look, I want you to take a letter, as though Mr. Hurley dictated it to you, addressed to me in the form of a memo."

"Very well. Shall I inform Mr. Hurley of this?"

"Of course."

She sat down at her desk, picked up a pencil. "I'm ready, Mr. Harper."

"Head this memo to Mr. Rick Harper. Address it to the Congress Hotel. Dear Mr. Harper, Because of circumstances which I cannot explain at this time I am compelled to dispense with your services. Bill me for your time and expenses and I shall forward a check to your office in San Francisco.



Yours very truly. Type it out and leave the carbon in that drawer together with your notebook. Date it as of today."

"Yes, sir, I'll do it now."

"Good. Give me the original."

She typed out the memo, handed him the original and placed the carbon and the notebook in the drawer. She looked up at him with an expression of relief. "I can't tell you how much better I feel now. It's as if a great weight was taken from my shoulders."

"I understand."

He did understand. He felt that her truly vast capacity for loyalty had been hurt and splintered for several long minutes. Betrayal was unthinkable to her. Harper saw that, as he understood how honesty was a complete fulfillment to her. Her loyalty was too strong to admit any genuine suspicion.

She was her old self again, smiling a small smile.

He said, "I hope I didn't shake you too much, Miss Webster."

"Frankly, you did. I was ready to jump out a window."

He grinned back. "Miss Webster, let me explain something to you. Mr. Hurley is a one-man operation. People like Brinks or Wells Fargo can overcome two or three or more robberies of their trucks. Not so Hurley. Brinks overcame a two million dollar robbery about a quarter century ago. They've had others. Wells Fargo has had several such experiences. They're big enough to come back after such blows. Mr. Hurley is on the spot. He can overcome the two he had suffered. The third one will knock him cold. You wouldn't want to see that happen, would you?"

"Oh, God, no, Mr. Harper." She shivered a little. "Mr. Hurley is a fine man, the best I've ever worked for."

"Good. Now then, if anything untoward comes up in the next few days, anything at all that doesn't smell right to you, make a note of it. I'll be in touch with you every day. Okay?"

"Of course, Mr. Harper. You may rely on me."

"Good girl. If anyone should

call the office asking about me, you tell them that my services have been dispensed with and that so far as you know I've returned to San Francisco."

"I'll do that."

"Thanks. You've been a lot of help."

"I'm glad, Mr. Harper. Very glad."

Downstairs, in the lobby of the building, Harper put in a long-distance call to San Francisco to a close friend, a former assistant district attorney in Chicago but who was now practicing law in the Bay City.

"This is a person to person call to Mr. Sam Kahn, operator. Make it collect. My name is Rick Harper."

"Yes, sir. One moment, please." There was a wait about a minute and then Kahn answered.

"Rick! What the hell are you doing in Chicago?"

"On a toughie, Sam. Real tough. I need some help."

"Name it."

Harper ran it down, giving him all the information he had and then added his suspicions. "You know a lot of the workings of the Syndicate, Sam. What's your opinion?"

"I would say you're on the right track. The guys in control now are far more intelligent, and a helluva lot more devious, than Torrio or Capone ever

were. They're executives, Rick, illegal entrepreneurs, if you will. They plunder legitimate businesses, use their investment capital then to broaden and expand the operation. After that, they slice it up into subsidiaries and it's a whole new structure, the old one having been plowed under completely. Smooth as silk. Convictions are all but impossible. I know the guy behind it, Mr. Big. Stephen Raines."

"Raines? Doesn't sound Italian or Sicilian. That his right name?"

"Nope. Changed it from Steve Ricchetti. He's the new financial wizard of the National Criminal Combine since Meyer Lansky took it on the run."

"They've got Lansky in Miami."

"Yes, I know. Read about it. Now, how can I help?"

"I'm a little concerned about slugging that cop. He may have turned in a report, if he's a legit cop but on the Syndicate's payroll. If so, they'll stop me cold."

"I'll take care of that. I'll call a friend of mine in the U.S. Attorney's Office. Name's Ronald Dubrow. Ron is a nice guy. Go up and see him and lay it on the line."

"Fine. That helps. One more thing. I need a car. I can't rent one because I'm sure the

Syndicate has the word out on me. I turned in the one I rented yesterday. You know anyone here that can help?"

"Just the guy. I went to school with him. He owns a Cadillac agency. Check him in the phone book; Triangle Motor Sales. I'll call him too. He'll give you what you want."

"That's fine, Sam. I'll do that right away."

"Give me a half hour first so I can contact Dubrow and Brower. Hal Brower, Triangle Motor Sales. Got it?"

"Got it. Thanks, Sam. I'll be in touch."

Harper got the car, an almost new '71 Eldorado two-door. Brower said, "If you need some help I can fit into just let me know. I don't know what I can do but you never can tell."

"Thanks, Hal. I'll keep it in mind."

"You can use the car as long as you'll need it. It's been gone over completely and is in perfect shape. The tank's full. Good luck."

"Thanks a million."

"Not at all. My pleasure, I'm sure."

Harper called Ronald Dubrow in the U.S. Attorney's Office.

"Been waiting to hear from you, Rick. Sam Kahn called me about an hour ago. Come on up."

"Be there in about twenty minutes."

"Good. Room 422."

RONALD DUBROW was a young man, Harper's age, tall, handsome, a brilliant lawyer and a dedicated prosecutor of crime. He shook hands warmly with Harper and led him into his private office.

"How can I help?" Dubrow asked.

Harper explained the situation. He went on, "I feel sure the mob will try another heist of Hurley's armored trucks."

"On the same road?"

"I'm sure of it."

"We can stop it. We can trail the truck."

"That's not the point. I want them to pull off the robbery. It's the only way we can break up the mob that's pulling the heists. If we trail the armored car they'll just wait. They can afford to wait. Hurley can't. Neither can I."

"How do you suppose they manage this magic act of making the truck disappear after only a few minutes?"

"I've got a pretty good idea. I'll see how it goes after they heist the third armored car."

"Suppose you miss? You'll put Hurley in exactly the spot the mob wants him."

"I've thought of that. However, I think I've got it

figured out. It's a big gamble, I know, but this is for all the blue chips and I have to play my cards. I've got to go for broke."

Dubrow grinned. "Broke for Hurley?"

Harper shrugged. "Him first, me second. If I miss, my reputation will be shot all to hell. I can't afford to miss."

"Okay. How do you plan to play it?"

"I'm going to rent a trailer and park it in that trailer court. You'll have to put some agents in it, day and night. I'll want my car equipped with a short wave radio and telephone so I can keep in constant touch with the agents in both the trailer and the cars."

"That can be arranged. I've been after this mob for a couple of years and haven't been able to touch them. This may be it. I think I'll put a couple of men on to tail you. After bouncing those two hoods around you can be sure there's a contract out on you. They're very efficient people."

"I don't like it but I'll go along. You're going to set it up?"

"All the way. Where's your car?"

"In the parking lot next to the building. A black Eldorado, two door. It has a dealer's plate on it."

"We'll find it. Look, I'm

having lunch with my wife in about twenty minutes. Carol would like to meet you. Meantime, I'll have your car equipped with the short wave stuff. Okay?"

"Fine."

"Let me make a few calls first and then we can go."

Everything was set up in the next ten minutes and the two men left to meet Carol in the Pump Room at the Ambassador East Hotel. She was waiting for them in the lobby, a slim, shapely young woman with a piquant face and innocent doe eyes that were deceptive because of the agile mind behind them. Dubrow made the introductions. Carol held out her hand.

"Your first visit to Chicago, Mr. Harper?" she asked.

"No. I've been here several times."

"Dear," Dubrow said, "this is *the* Rick Harper. All-America from USC. Ran crazy against Notre Dame. Remember?"

"Before my time, darling," she quipped. "Let's go in. I'm famished." She turned to Harper. "I was joking. I do recall some of your exploits. They mention you from time to time on the sports pages, don't they?"

"You read the sports pages?"

"Avidly. I have a whole slew to Chicago until then?"

of heroes from Babe Ruth to Joe Namath."

The lunch was excellent, and Carol kept Harper amused with her bright sallies. For the time he forgot the dangers he was facing, and the importance of his assignment.

He said, "You're much too young to talk of our permissive society, Henry Kissinger, ecology, Kahlil Gibran, and Joe Namath." He turned to Dubrow. "Where did you find this little vixen?"

"In a school for wayward girls. They begged me to take her out of there."

"I'll bet. By the way, how long have you two been married?"

"Married?" Carol put in quickly. "Who's married. We're planning on that after we have our second or third child."

Dubrow grinned. "See what I mean, Rick?"

"Precisely. Well, there's nothing wrong with it, as I see it."

Carol reached out a hand and patted Harper on the arm. "That's good for you. In truth, we're going to celebrate our first anniversary in two weeks. If you're still in town, we'd like to have you at a small party we're giving."

"I'd be delighted to come."

"Then you will be in

"It depends on several factors, things beyond my control at the moment. But, if I'm here I'll surely attend."

It had been a charming and relaxing respite from the ordeal of the last two days and Harper told himself he had enjoyed it no end. In the lobby, Carol said she had an appointment with Dr. Julian Sterling.

"A routine checkup, dear. Afterward, Reba Sterling and I will do some shopping. See you at dinner." She turned to Harper. "Mr. Harper, it's been a pleasure. I'm looking forward to seeing you at our anniversary."

Back in the office, Dubrow checked with the government garage. Harper's car was ready. He said, "Rick, you're all set. What are your plans?"

"I'll have to check with Hurley as to when the next run will be made over that route. I think it's on Friday. That's a day after tomorrow. I'm going to rent a small mobile home and take it out to that court and set it up. Then, you'll have to arrange with the FBI to put their people into it. It will have to be done at night in order to divert any suspicion."

"I understand."

"Shall I put in some provisions, food, liquids, something?"

"No, that won't be neces-

sary. They'll make their own arrangements. I'll get in touch with the Commissioner of the State Police for a backup to the FBI. I'll talk to the agent in charge here and we'll go over the surveillance and arrest plan. You let me know about the run and any other information you get that will aid us."

"Sure thing."

"Where are you living now?" Dubrow asked.

Harper gave him the address.

"I'll have a couple of agents drive around there to check it out for any suspicious characters. You're very much on the spot, Rick."

"I'm sure of it. Okay. I'm grateful for your help."

"I'm grateful to you. I want to break up this damned mob. I'm glad you're here." He held out his hand.

Harper found a mobile home rental agency and rented a compact type home, then drove out to the court situated between The Sag and Willow Springs. The owner was a big guy with a busted nose and one cauliflower ear. He was about the same age as Mike Devlin, the doorman at the Congress Hotel.

"Yeah, I got plenty of space," the owner said. "What's your name?"

"Hammond. Russell Hammond. What's yours, sir?"



"Tom Dunn. Who recommended you to my place?"

Harper thought fast. The suspicion he had harbored about Devlin was still in his mind. He decided to test it. He said, "Mike Devlin. You know him?"

"Yeah. I fought him. Got a draw. How's the bum doing?"

"Okay. He knows the ropes and how to make a buck."

"Yeah, I know. I ain't talked to him for a few months. Look, you take that spot over there at the end of the line. I'll set you up. How long you gonna stay?"

"Indefinite. Maybe a couple months or so."

"That's fine. I gotta charge

you a month in advance. A C-note. Okay?"

"Sure."

"I pay all the electricity but I would like you to turn off your lights when you ain't in the home."

"Sure, Tom. No problem." Harper counted out a hundred dollars and handed it to Dunn who pocketed the money.

"You want a receipt?"

"I don't think so. You look like a solid guy."

"You bet I am. Everybody knows Tom Dunn. Ain't never crossed anybody in my life."

Harper thought, *Except the law.* "Okay, Mr. Dunn," he said. I'll be seeing you!"

He drove the car to the end of the line indicated by Dunn, unhooked the mobile home, waited until Dunn came to set him up then left. He drove back to Chicago and to his room. When he got there he saw an ambulance in front of the house. He went in. Two young men met him. They flashed their I.D. cards.

"FBI, Mister. What's your name?"

"Rick Harper. I live here."

"Got some identification?" the taller of the two agents asked.

Harper showed them his license. "What's up?"

"You're the guy we're supposed to protect, right?"

"I guess so. Mr. Dubrow was a little concerned about my safety. Why the ambulance?"

"Mrs. Swanson. She's been brutally beaten. I guess the boys who were looking for you found her instead. She's in bad shape, may die. That's what the doctor told us."

"You talk with her?"

"As much as we could. She said she could identify the two hoods who beat her up. We got that much out of her."

Two ambulance men carrying a stretcher came into view then. They were followed by a doctor or intern. Harper looked closely at Mrs. Swanson as they carried her by. Her eyes were closed. Her face was ashen. The intern paused.

"If you want her to make an identification of the men who attacked her I'd suggest you do it as quickly as possible. She's bleeding internally and I think there's some brain damage. I'd say she has two or three hours at the most." He shook his head. "One of the worst beatings I've seen in a long time. They must be animals."

"They are," Harper said.

One of the agents said, "You got any ideas, Harper?"

"Yes, I think so. They must be the same two I slugged in the Congress Hotel. I can make them. Can we get some mug shots from the local cops?"

"Sure. All the cops in this town aren't on the take. Captain O'Grady at headquarters is one of them. Let's go!"

Harper thought of the two big hoods. He said, "I'd give a whole lot to be locked in a cell with those guys, one at a time so I could really work them over."

"I'll go along with that," Agent Paul Burns said. "We're not going to get that pleasure. I know."

The three men piled into the car. Agent Gordon Brooks took the wheel. They sped to the 11th and State Street Police Headquarters.

CAPTAIN John O'Grady headed the Hoodlum Squad and was a sworn enemy of the Syndicate. He knew Agents Burns and Brooks and had worked with them on several cases. Burns introduced Harper.

"What's your interest in this case, Mr. Harper?" Captain O'Grady asked.

"I was engaged by William Hurley to stop the hijackings of his armored cars. It was supposed to be a confidential operation. On my part, that is." He shook his head. "The two goons were waiting for me in my room at the Congress the next day. They threatened me. Told me to get out of town or

else. I slugged both of them then checked out. I rented a room from Mrs. Swanson. I thought I'd be safe from those guys until I was able to finish my job. They've got one helluva spy system."

"Yeah!" O'Grady grunted. "Why not? Half the cops in town are on their payroll. Look, Mr. Harper, let me fill you in a little. Since the days of Big Jim Colosimo, Johnny Torrio, Al Capone, and all the others, the only thing that's changed in this town has been the administration. And I mean, the political setup, some cops in top slots, and the big guys in the Syndicate. One follows another but the status quo remains. Okay, describe the two hoods you flattened."

Harper described them.

O'Grady nodded. "Big Gus Messina and Nick DiAngelo. You were lucky, Harper. They kill easily. You must be good with your fists. Okay, let's look at some mugs." He pulled out a drawer, took out ten photos, laid them on the desk. "Pick 'em out."

Harper shuffled through the mug shots quickly, picked out the two hoods who had challenged him in the Congress Hotel. "Those two, Captain. Are they Messina and DiAngelo?"

"They're the two bums! I've

been after them for years. About a dozen unsolved killings. They either scare the hell out of any witnesses or kill them. Okay, you've got it. I'm going to send one of my best men with you, Lieutenant Barney MacDonald. He'll witness any statement made by Mrs. Swanson. I'll also have the D.A. send along one of his men and a stenographer. Hold it." He picked up the phone, dialed a number.

"Shannon? Captain O'Grady. I'd like you to send up either Warren or Dalton to my office, whichever one is available, and a steno. I've got two FBI agents waiting. Yeah. A death-bed statement. An old lady was severely beaten by a couple of Syndicate hoods. We think we can get a make on 'em. That's right. Now. No time to lose. Thanks." He turned to the three men. "About five minutes. You can go in a police car. Get you there faster."

At the hospital, a doctor and nurse went along with the group into Mrs. Swanson's room. Doctor Mark Phillips advised them to make it quick.

"We're going to take her into surgery in about five minutes. I don't know if we can save her but we'll give it one hell of a shot. Okay, this is it. We administered a mild sedation, enough to ease the pain but not

enough to put her to sleep. We figured you would want a statement from her."

"Thanks, Doctor," Lieutenant MacDonald said.

The group approached the bed. The stenographer set up her stand and shorthand machine near the bed. She nodded.

Lieutenant MacDonald touched Mrs. Swanson lightly on the shoulder and she opened her eyes. There was a lot of courage in her. She saw Harper and gave him a wan smile. He smiled back but his heart hurt. He felt he was responsible for what had been done to her. A terrible hate against the men who had beaten her surged through him.

Lieutenant MacDonald said, "Mrs. Swanson, we want to get the men who did this to you. I have some photographs here that I want to show you. Do you think you'll be able to recognize the men who beat you?"

Mrs. Swanson barely nodded her head.

"I'll hold them out to you, one at a time. If you recognize them just answer *yes* to my question. Do you understand, Mrs. Swanson?"

She murmured a feeble, "Yes."

"One more thing, Mrs. Swanson. This is important to the case. The doctor tells me it

is possible you may die. Do you understand that? If you do, just say, 'Yes.'"

"Yes," she replied.

MacDonald turned to the stenographer, "Take this down in form."

She nodded.

"My name is Barney MacDonald. I am a detective assigned to the Hoodlum Squad under Captain John O'Grady, Police Headquarters, 11th and State Street. This is a death-bed statement taken from Mrs. Emily Swanson at General Hospital, December 8, 1972. Present are Doctor Mark Phillips, Nurse Susan Preston, FBI Agents Gordon Brooks, and Paul Burns, and Private Investigator Rick Harper." He turned to Mrs. Swanson. Two rows of tears were coursing slowly down her cheeks. Harper wanted to cry.

"Mrs. Swanson, I have some photographs I want to show you. There are ten photos in all. I will show them to you one at a time. If you recognize the men who attacked you I want you to indicate it by saying, 'That is one of the men.' Will you do that?"

"Yes."

He held out a photograph. She looked at it and shook her head. He kept repeating the question, "Is this one of the men who attacked you?" At

the fifth question she pointed her finger.

"That is one of the men." It was Big Gus Messina. She picked out Nick DiAngelo two photos later."

An intern came in then. "They're ready in surgery, Doctor."

"Fine. Get her ready." He turned to Mrs. Swanson. "We're going to operate, Mrs. Swanson. We're going to do everything we can to help you. Don't be afraid. Trust us. Will you do that?"

"Yes, Doctor," she replied.

He patted her shoulder. "Good girl." He nodded to the group. "Okay. That's it."

"We'll stick around, Doctor," Lieutenant MacDonald said. "How long?"

"Can't say. An hour anyway."

"That's fine. Where can I use a phone?"

"In my office. Let's go."

The group hurried to Doctor Phillip's office. MacDonald dialed Captain O'Grady's number.

"Got it, Cap. Positive make on Messina and DiAngelo. They're preparing her for surgery now. Very doubtful. Yes. Make it Murder One. You'll send out an APB? Good."

Doctor Phillips went up to surgery and the group sat down to wait. The minutes passed

slowly. Fifteen minutes. A half hour. An hour. Twenty minutes later Doctor Phillips came in. His face was pale and drawn.

"She died on the operating table," he said solemnly. "We tried hard." He sat down at his desk. "We tried so damn hard . . ."

He pounded the desk with a fist in frustration and bent his head to his hands.

Harper felt the white heat of anger surge within him. The wild dimension of greed, corruption, and violence with which he had dealt in the past several years hadn't touched the edges of an innocent old woman. Not in his experience. Now that he had come face to face with it, and knew in a quite relevant way that he had been a part of it, involved in a conspiracy of guilt, he was flooded with a shame he couldn't define and a regret he could.

He thought of how it must have been for Mrs. Swanson when she faced Big Gus Messina and Nick DiAngelo, terrorized, pitiful, but refusing to bend her principles. They had come looking for him and she, despite the fact that she had known him only for minutes, had refused to tell them anything. Somehow, he told himself, somehow, before they came under the protection of the law

they flaunted, he would pay them back.

Agent Burns picked up the phone and dialed the Federal District Attorney's office, asked for Richard Dubrow. The Assistant D.A. came on seconds later.

"Agent Burns, Mr. Dubrow. Mrs. Swanson died a few minutes ago," he said. He explained what had happened. "There's an APB out for Messina and DiAngelo. The Syndicate will no doubt get that information and send those two into hiding. They may be hard to find."

"We'll find them. Is Harper with you?"

"Yes."

"Put him on."

Harper took the phone. Dubrow gave him the information he had.

"I talked with Hurley a short time ago, Rick. There's going to be a shipment of money to a chemical plant in that area where the two robberies took place. Hurley let that information out. We figure someone in his organization is working with the Syndicate. Hurley has a pretty idea of who it might be."

"I figured there was an inside man."

"Had to be. Are you all set at the trailer park?"

"All set."

"Good. I'll have some agents

there tonight. Nine o'clock. It will be dark enough so that no one will see them going into your trailer. They'll set up short wave equipment. You stay right there with them."

"Is that necessary?"

"I think so."

Lieutenant Barney MacDonald touched Harper on the shoulder. "Don't hang up. I want to talk to Dubrow."

Harper handed him the phone.

"Lieutenant MacDonald, Mr. Dubrow. Are you planning to coordinate the search and apprehension of DiAngelo and Messina with our department?"

"Of course."

"You understand, I'm sure, that the beating and death of Mrs. Swanson is strictly a police matter."

"I do. However, the robbery of the armored cars is a federal matter. They were conveying bank money consigned to industrial payrolls. Until that money is delivered safely it remains under bank authority and responsibility. The armored car service thus is an agent of the bank. That's a federal offense. Your department will be searching for the killers. We'll be searching for bank robbers. If they are the same persons, so much the better. Am I clear?"

"Precisely."

"Good. I'll get in touch with Captain O'Grady and set up a plan of coordination."

"You'll also have to talk with Inspector Ed Garvin of Homicide. I imagine Captain O'Grady has already done that."

"Okay. I'll follow it up."

"When is the shipment of money to be?"

"Tomorrow morning at six o'clock. The armored car will leave the garage a little after five."

"Got it. Thanks."

Harper left with Agents Burns and Brooks. In the car, he said, "Let's take a drive over to the Congress Hotel. I think the doorman there, an ex-pug named Mike Devlin, is playing footsie with the Syndicate."

He told them of his suspicions as to how the Syndicate learned of his coming, the reason for his presence, and how they learned of his whereabouts when he checked in at the Congress.

"It's possible," Agent Brooks said. "It's also possible you were followed by someone from the airport. What do you intend to do about Devlin?"

"I'd like you take him in for interrogation."

"On what charge?"

"Conspiracy to commit a bank robbery."

"It won't hold water. If all



he did was to give out information at to your presence that doesn't constitute a crime. Anyone could have got that information by simply calling the hotel switchboard."

"I understand that. I don't think he does. He's friendly with Tom Dunn, another ex-pug, who owns the trailer camp."

"How does Dunn and the trailer camp fit in?" Agent Burns asked.

"I'm not sure except that I feel the disappearance of the armored cars is a mystery that can be solved there. I get feelings about things like that. It hit me as soon as I saw the trailer camp. The answer lies there. I'm sure of it."

"You had better be right, Harper," Agent Brooks said. "If you aren't, the ball game is over. You understand that the FBI, the State Police, and the two units of the Chicago

Hoodlum and Homicide divisions will have their best men on this, some of them all night in your trailer and on the road. It's going to be one hell of an operation."

"I understand. If I'm wrong, my name will be mud."

"Okay," Agent Brooks said, "we'll go along. We'll pick up the doorman."

They arrived at the Congress Hotel, parked at the curb. Agent Burns and Harper got out of the car. Mike Devlin came toward them. He stopped short when he saw Harper. His face went a little pale and he mumbled an incoherent greeting.

Harper said, "You're in trouble, Mike. We want to talk to you."

Agent Burns flashed his credentials. "FBI, Devlin. Get in. We're taking you downtown."

"Uh—what for? I ain't done nothin'. I can't leave my post. I'll get fired."

"You should have thought of that before," Agent Burns said. "Get in the car." He took hold of Devlin's arm and shoved him toward the car. Harper got in the back seat with Devlin.

All the way to the federal building Devlin wanted to know what it was all about. No one answered him. He was taken into Dubrow's office and told

to sit down. Burns stayed with him while Harper and Brooks talked with Dubrow in an ante office. Dubrow nodded.

"It's worth a try. Let's sweat him a little."

"Let me have the first shot at him," Harper said. "You can play it by ear after that."

The three men returned to the room where Devlin sat with his head in his hands. He looked up when Harper spoke.

"Mike," Harper said, "the armored car robberies have turned into a murder. An innocent old woman. We know that you've been giving all kinds of information to the Syndicate on guests at the hotel. We know you are implicated in the robberies. I talked with Tom Dunn."

"We've got Dunn locked up, Devlin," Dubrow said then. "You can save yourself by coming clean, telling us what you know or face the consequences. Bank robbery and murder. That's a life sentence."

"I had nothing to do with the robberies. I don't know nothin' about no murder. You gotta believe me. I'm tellin' you the truth."

"You did tell the Syndicate that Mr. Harper had checked in. We know that much."

Devlin dropped his head. "Yeah," he said. "They gave me a C-note if I'd tell them if he

checked into the hotel. I didn't know who he was or why they wanted to know. Honest."

"Okay. Now, how about Tom Dunn. What's his connection in the robberies?"

"I don't know. All I know is that Tom told me the guys keep a trailer there and they pay him good. Five hundred a week."

The men exchanged glances.

"What kind of trailer, Mike?" Harper asked.

"A small trailer. They bring it in one day and then they take it away and don't come back for a while, but they pay him the five hundred every week. That's all I know."

"When do they take the trailer away?" Dubrow asked.

"A couple days later. He said it was funny because they don't live in it. There's always two, three guys watching it. That's all I know. I'm telling you the truth. Honest."

"Okay, Mike," Dubrow said. "We'll find out. If you're telling us the truth we'll release you and see to it that you get your job back. We'll have to lock up you for a few days."

"If the guys find out I talked to you they'll kill me!" he moaned. "You don't know them guys."

"We know them, Mike," Dubrow snapped. "Nobody will know you talked with us."

"How am I going to explain

to the manager that I left my post?"

"I'll take care of it. You can have anything you want to eat or read. We'll put you in a special cell." Dubrow turned to Burns. "Lock him up in the witness cell."

When Burns returned the four men got together. Dubrow asked, "What do you make of it? Why the trailer?"

"Hard to figure," Brooks said.

"Doesn't make sense to me," Burns said.

"I think I know," Harper declared. "It's far fetched and may sound crazy as hell but I think that trailer is the key to how they manage to hide the armored car, get it off the road as quickly as they do. We'll know tomorrow morning for sure."

THE LONG wait began. Waiting, watching, and listening for Rick Harper and the two agents in the trailer. They spoke briefly to each other at intervals. One of them would doze and the other two remained at the narrow windows. Then all three would be awake. They drank black coffee from a gallon thermos, their eyes never leaving the road that led into the park or the frame house to the left where Tom Dunn lived.

"You figure Dunn is involved in this?" Agent Burns asked.

"You mean as a principal?" Harper replied.

"Yes."

"No. I think Devlin told the truth about that. However, I'm pretty certain he knows the score. He's not punchy by any means, and the kind of money he's getting for the service he's giving, hell, he knows exactly what's doing."

"That would make him an accessory."

"It would."

In Chicago, two squads of police in unmarked cars watched the garage of the armored car service. On the highway between the Sag and Willow Springs two teams of State Police in unmarked cars rode up and down the road.

Five o'clock. There was restless movement in the small trailer. Harper moved from window to window. Agents Burns and Brooks sipped coffee and smoked.

Harper said, "I think we should move out, get on the road."

"Not yet," Burns said. "Let's give it another half hour. The plan is set up for five-thirty. All units will then begin the coordinated maneuvers."

Harper didn't answer. He was anxious to get into action,

to get his hands on Big Gus Messina and Nick DiAngelo, and he was certain both of them would be in on the heist.

The minutes passed slowly for Harper. Five-fifteen. He paced the trailer. Five-twenty. Seconds never moved slower. Five-thirty.

"Let's go!" Agent Brooks said.

The three men checked their weapons, moved from the trailer at intervals of thirty seconds, each one glancing at the frame house. There was no sign of movement there. There were no lights. They got into the car and drove out onto the highway, Brooks at the wheel, Burns beside him, and Harper in the rear seat.

Burns picked up the phone. "Unit five to Unit One. Come in."

There was an immediate reply. "Unit One. Come in, Five."

"We're on the road. We'll patrol according to Plan A."

"Roger. Maintain your position until further orders. Out."

"Got it."

They drove for a mile and then turned and drove back, driving at thirty miles an hour. On the way back, one of the unmarked State Police cars passed them. They signaled each other by a quick flashing of their bright and dim lights. A

half mile down the other State Police car passed them. Again the same signals.

Six o'clock!

"Unit One to Unit Five. Come in!"

"Unit Five. Ready."

"Armored car approaching. Do not intercept. Allow robbery to develop. All other units already advised. Reply."

"Roger. Wilco." Brooks turned in his seat toward Harper. "I wonder what the hell that's for?"

"What do they do with the armored car, Brooks! That's what it's for. How the hell do they get it off the road so fast?" He looked up. "I see the armored car. Pass it!"

The armored car came down the road, passed them. They drove on for a quarter mile and then made a U-turn and turned off the lights, slowed down to a crawl.

The short wave radio blared. "All units on the alert. Do not approach. Robbery is in progress!"

The three men saw it then. Two large sedans had blocked the road forcing the armored car to stop. Six men stood on the road. Some of them were armed with machine-guns. Three were armed with shot-guns. One held a bazooka. The three guards in the armored car stood on the road with their

hands in the air. One of the men with a machine-gun spoke to them and pointed to a side road. He then unarmed the three guards and motioned them toward the side road. They trotted off without turning around. Then it happened.

Three of the bandits rushed to one of the sedans and removed a large plastic tarpaulin, threw it over the armored car, fixed it securely with fasteners, and the car was instantly turned into a trailer home!

"The clever bastards!" Harper swore. "A plastic cover painted to simulate a trailer! That was my hunch but I wouldn't believe it!"

"Well, you sure were right as hell!" Burns said.

"Unit five to Unit one. What now?"

"You beat me to the call, Unit five. Proceed at once to your position in the trailer court. Do not attempt apprehension. Wait!"

"Roger. We're off."

Brooks stepped on the gas, turned on his lights. They passed the camouflaged armored car and the two sedans, came to the mobile court, drove in, parked in front of their trailer and hurried in. They were not seen by Tom Dunn. Two minutes later, one of the sedans

pulled in, then the camouflaged armored car, and then the other sedan. The three cars parked in spaces to the right of Harper's trailer. There was another large trailer next to the space where the armored car was parked. The six men went into that.

"That's why the armored car couldn't be spotted," Harper said. "Look. A perfect camouflage. That big oak hides a great deal of the armored car, and the trailer next to it also shields it. This thing was carefully planned."

"You recognize any of them, Harper?" Burns asked.

"I'm sure one of them was Messina. Couldn't see the others."

"Unit five, come in."

Burns picked up the phone. "Unit five. Come in."

"The trailer park is surrounded. Maintain surveillance. Do not attempt apprehension under any circumstances. Reply."

"Roger."

The long wait began again. The men were out of coffee and cigarettes. Hours went by. There was no move from the big trailer. Noon. Still no move on the part of the bandits. Two o'clock. Four o'clock. Still no move. Harper swore. A half hour later, one of the men came out of the big trailer, looked around, then went back in.

Harper said, "That's Messina Boy, I want him!"

Burns said, "I think you just may get your chance at him now."

A few minutes later all six men came out. They looked around, seemed to be satisfied. They got into the camouflaged armored car.

Burns picked up the phone. "Unit five to Unit one. Come in."

"Unit one. Come in, Unit five."

"They're getting into the armored car. Give us instructions."

"Wait. We've got them covered at all points."

The armored car moved slowly out of its space toward the back of the trailer court. Camouflaged by a clump of trees was a huge barn. The car drove into the barn.

Burns picked up the phone. "Unit five to Unit one. Come in."

"Unit one. Come in."

"The armored car was driven into a large barn behind the frame house a minute ago. I think this is where the action is."

"Fine. We'll move in. Give us five minutes before you start out. We'll move in on foot. Wait for us!"

"Roger."

Five minutes later, Harper

saw a dozen men come in from all sides of the trailer court. Two of the men went to the frame house, one at the front door and the other at the back. Harper, Burns, and Brooks came out of the trailer.

Special Agent Walter Cutler whispered orders. The six State Police detectives nodded and moved toward the barn. Four FBI agents walked stealthily toward the entrance to the barn. Harper, Brooks, and Burns split up and took positions about twenty feet from the barn. There was a simultaneous converging on the barn. Cutler kicked the door open and shouted:

"FBI. Raise your hands!"

There was an immediate sound of gunfire. Cutler dropped to the ground and returned the fire. The State Police detectives and the other agents fired too. The shooting continued for several minutes. A big, hulking figure broke from the barn, shooting as he ran. It was Messina!

Messina got past Cutler and another agent. He was about ten feet from Harper as he ran.

"Stop, Messina!" Harper yelled, and pointed his gun.

Messina whirled, fired at Harper, who ducked behind a tree. The big hood fired again and again, and then his gun was empty. Harper ran out. He ran

like a middle-line-backer red-dogging a quarterback, threw himself at Messina. The big hood went down in a heap. Harper rose quickly, grabbed the lapels of Messina's coat and yanked him to his feet.

Messina threw a wild right which missed and Harper hit him with three lefts to the face, a hard right to the body, slugged him to the face with rights and lefts. Bones broke. Harper kept punching. Messina was bleeding from the nose and mouth. Harper wouldn't let up. He kept up a barrage of blows to the hood's face until it was a mask of crimson. Several more blows to the face cracked Messina's front teeth. Two rights and lefts closed his eyes. And then he collapsed.

The gunfire had ceased from the barn. Agents and State Police led three of the bandits out in handcuffs. The other two were dead.

Harper was in Ronald Dubrow's office the next day. Dubrow was pleased. "You're hunch was right, Rick. All except one thing. But then, how was anyone to know that."

"Know what, Ron?"

"That the gang had a huge acetylene plant in that barn, cut up the armored truck into scrap and then moved it into one of their own scrap yards, where it was mixed in with tons of other

miscellaneous scrap and sold to steel mills."

"I thought of that, too. However, I felt that one wild guess was enough. Had I mentioned that to you I think you'd have had me committed. Did Messina confess?"

"Yes. We got Mr. Big. And a lot of the smaller fish too. I had to promise Messina I'd send him to a nice quiet penitentiary under a John Doe alias and drop the Murder One to Murder Two. It won't make any difference. The judge is going to throw the book at him anyway. You sure did one helluva job on him. He'll be in the hospital for a month."

"I could have killed him. He was a clay pigeon. But I wanted to give him a taste of his own medicine first. Then again, living in a cell for the rest of his

life will give him a lot to think about concerning the beating up of old ladies."

Dubrow grinned. "Well, I'll say one thing for you, you sure blew in a storm. Do you do that on all your cases?"

"Only when someone beats up an innocent old lady." Harper rose. "It was a pleasure knowing you. I forgot to thank you for the lunch."

"My pleasure. We have to do it again sometime."

Harper grinned. "Under less strenuous circumstances, I hope."

"Have a nice trip back to San Francisco."

"Thanks, Ron. Give my regards to Carol." Harper extended his hand. Dubrow shook it, and both men grinned, for different reasons, but each knew why the other did.

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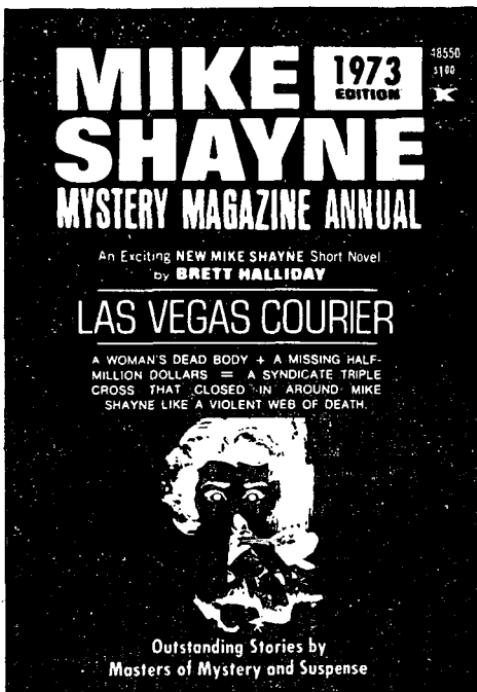
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The Inside Man

*They worked by night; their tracks were covered.
Nothing could come between them and a fortune.
Nothing but a little bit of Murder.*

by CLARK HOWARD



JACK DALL was coming down the freeway off-ramp when he saw the red sports car pulled onto the shoulder of the road with a flat. Two easy rider cycles were parked behind it and a couple of long-haired freaks were trying to talk to the girl in the car. She had the window up and the door locked, and it looked like she wasn't having any part of them.

Dall pulled his telephone company installation truck on to the side of the road a dozen yards down and parked. He slipped a cable wrench under his belt and got out. When he walked back toward the sports

car, the two freaks stood side by side to meet him.

"Want something, man?" one of them asked.

"Just thought I'd see if I could help the young lady," Dall said.

"We're taking care of that," the other freak told him.

Dall looked at the rolled-up windows and the depressed door locks. He shifted his eyes to the girl; she had a pleading look on her face.

Dall turned his attention back to the longhairs. "Doesn't look like she wants your help," he said quietly. "Why don't you split and let me try my luck."

A Story of Intrigue and Doublecross



He looked them up and down. "I don't think she's your type anyway."

"Man, how'd you like us to take you apart?" the first freak said.

Dall slipped the cable wrench from under his belt. "How'd you like me to open your skull with this piece of steel?" he said. The tone of his voice remained quiet, almost polite.

"The odds are two to one against you, man."

"They won't be for long," Dall said. He hefted the wrench in striking position and stepped toward them. They backed off at once.

"Okay, okay! Don't start swinging that thing. We're on our way."

Dall moved to the side and gave them plenty of room to walk around him. They went over to their easy riders and hopped on. Kicking off, they sped away down the road. Dall walked over to the red sports car and the girl got out.

"You're a lifesaver," she said. "Those two creeps had me in there for ten minutes. They came along right after I got the flat. The minute I saw them stopping I got in the car and locked the door. And would you believe six other people went by without bothering to stop?"

"They may not have noticed what the situation was," Dall said.

"Well, I'm sure glad you did. Those guys had me scared silly."

"Unlock the trunk and I'll put the spare on for you," Dall offered.

"Listen, you don't have to do that," she said. "Just give me a lift to the nearest phone and I'll call the auto club."

"Sometimes it takes them a while to get here," Dall said. "I can change it for you and have you on your way in ten minutes."

He took the keys out of her hand and walked back to the trunk before she could object further.

"This is awfully nice of you," she said as he hooked her bumper jack in place.

Dall smiled as he went back for the spare. "Can't let a pretty girl like you get captured by the Hell's Angels," he told her.

He had the flat off and the spare in place in the ten minutes he had predicted. When he was finished, he put the flat in the trunk and bolted it down.

"You can get that fixed next time you stop for gas," he told her.

"You're awfully nice," the girl said. "Would you be

offended if I offered to pay you?"

"Sure would," he replied easily. "I might even take the tire back off."

"Don't do that," she said in mock horror. "I've had enough for one day." She took back the keys Dall handed her. "Thank you so much."

"You're welcome."

Dall watched her get back into the sports car; her legs, he saw as she swung them under the steering wheel, were very nice. They waved a friendly good-by to each other as she drove away. When she was gone, Dall walked back to his telephone company truck.

The next day, in a drugstore near the university campus, Dall was sitting at the coffee counter reading the classified ads when the girl from the red sports car came over and sat down next to him.

"Hi. I thought that was you. I almost didn't recognize you without a wrench in your hand."

"Small world," said Dall. "What are you doing around here?"

"I go to the university," she told him. "I stop in here nearly every day after classes." She noticed that Dall was not wearing work clothes. "Is this your day off?"

"In a way," he answered. He

closed the newspaper, but not before she saw that it had been turned to the help wanted columns.

"You lost your job!" she said as the realization struck her. "Was it because of me? Were you late doing something because you stopped to help me?"

"That was just a small part of it. There was a lot more to it than that."

"But it was part of it. I feel awful!"

"Listen, forget it," Dall said. "I've been fired before. Relax. I'll buy you a cup of coffee."

"Maybe I'd better buy you one." She put her books on the counter and sighed heavily. "My father was going to write a nice letter to the telephone company today, commanding you for helping me yesterday. I even got your truck number so they'd be sure and know who we were talking about. When I told my father about those two on the cycles, he was furious."

"I can understand why," said Dall. He signaled the counter man for another cup of coffee.

"When he finds out they fired you, he'll probably still write a letter; the words will just be different."

"Tell him to forget it," Dall said. "It wasn't that good a job." He picked up one of her

books. "What are you studying?"

"My major is American history. I plan to teach after I graduate next June." Her coffee was served and she took a sip without adding any cream or sugar.

"I know what we can do," she said after a moment's thought. "You can come out to the house and meet my father. I'm sure he can find a job for you. Maybe in his own firm; he's an importer—"

"I don't think so," said Dall. "Thanks anyway."

"But why not?"

"I don't want your father to think I'm hitting him up for a job just because I changed a tire for his daughter."

"He won't think that at all. Besides, that isn't all you did; you were ready to fight those two creeps yesterday. Now I insist you come out to the house."

"I don't think so."

"We'll make it this Saturday."

"I said no."

"Come about ten o'clock," she said, writing the address on a napkin. "Bring a swim suit and we'll spend an hour or so in the pool and then have lunch with Daddy." She pushed her coffee away. "How can you drink that? It's terrible. Wait until you taste my coffee." She

grabbed her books and, before he could stop her, both checks. "See you Saturday."

"Hey," he called before she got to the register. She stopped and turned back. "As long as you're adopting me, don't you think we should know each other's name?"

"Now you're thinking positively," she said. "I'm Lydia Treese."

"Jack Dall," he said.

Lydia smiled. "See you Saturday?"

Dall nodded. "See you Saturday."

As she walked out, he noticed again what splendid legs she had.

On Saturday, when Dall saw Lydia Treese, in a bikini, he discovered that the rest of her was as splendid as her legs. She had a smooth, evenly tanned body that seemed to flow in liquid-like movements.

She swam with the grace of a dolphin and easily outraced him the length of the pool four times before he gave up.

"You're too good for me," he finally admitted. "Your father must have thrown you into the water at birth."

"My mother did, practically. She was a marvelous swimmer."

"Was?"

"Yes, she passed away when I was twelve." They were sitting on the pool edge, dangling their

feet in the water. "Are your parents living?"

Dall shook his head. "I grew up in an orphanage back in Chicago."

While they were talking, Lydia's father, Leo Treese, came over to them. He was a greying, pleasant man with a hint of hardness in his face.

"Have you two worked up an appetite yet?" Treese asked.

"Anyone foolish enough to race your daughter in the water is bound to work up an appetite," Dall replied.

Treese laughed. "I know exactly what you mean." He put his arm around Lydia's towel-draped shoulders and gave her a brief hug. "I've had a table set out on the garden patio. We'll have lunch as soon as you've changed."

Treese left and Lydia showed Dall back to the guest room where he had left his clothes. "Meet you outside in a few minutes," she said.

"Right." Dall took her hand before she could walk away. They were standing very close to each other. Lydia's wet bikini was molded to her figure. "Whether your dad has a job for me or not, I'm glad I came."

Lydia squeezed his hand. "I'm glad too, Jack."

They lunched around a glass-topped table on an inlaid stone patio overlooking a



precisely manicured lawn and garden. All around them was an aura of quiet elegance.

"I want you to know that I'm deeply appreciative of what you did for Lydia the other day," Treese said. "She's all I've got, and if anything happened to her—"

"Knowing your daughter, I can understand how you feel," Dall said. "I'm glad I happened by."

"Lydia tells me your stopping to help her may have had something to do with you losing your job."

"I tried to talk her out of that notion," Dall told him. "Without much success, I'm afraid."

"She's about as hard-headed as they come, all right," Treese said wryly.

"I might have known you two would throw in together," Lydia commented. "Birds of a feather. No wonder you hear so much about women's lib."

They chatted idly as they lunched. Toward the end of the meal, while they were having their coffee, Dall glanced across the broad expanse of lawn and noticed a powder blue Continental enter the grounds. It proceeded along the winding drive and parked next to the estate's two tennis courts.

"My attorney," Leo Treese told Dall. "He's dropping by with some papers for me. Suppose we join him in the library, Jack. Then we can have our little talk."

The two men excused themselves and Dall accompanied his host to a large, book-filled, beam-ceilinged room. A man in his late thirties, wearing a suit that was obviously tailor-made, was waiting there for them. Treese introduced him to Dall.

"Jack Dall, Jerome Hollis. Jerome is my lawyer, as I told you. Sit down, won't you." Treese himself took a chair

behind a large desk. "Do you have that file, Jerome?"

"Yes, right here." Hollis opened an attache case and handed Treese a thin manilla folder. Treese placed it on the desk without opening it.

"Jack is interested in finding a good, steady job, Jerome. And since he was gallant enough to help Lydia out of an uncomfortable situation the other day, I thought I'd see what I could do for him. How long have you been in town, Jack?"

"About six months," Dall said.

"Had any other jobs besides the one at the phone company?"

"No, that's the only one."

Treese smiled. "While Lydia and I were waiting for you at lunch, she mentioned that you grew up in an orphanage. Chicago, wasn't it?"

"Chicago, yes."

Still smiling, Treese opened the manila folder and glanced at the single, typewritten sheet it contained. "Of course, it really wasn't an orphanage at all, was it? It was the St. Charles Reform School, I believe."

Dall's jaw tightened slightly. He did not answer.

"And you have had a couple of other jobs since you hit town, I see. You worked for a month pumping gas at the Four

Star Service Station and were let go when the register on your shift tallied up thirty dollars short. Then you got a job driving a parcel delivery van. Two weeks later you, uh—lost a package containing an expensive ladies watch. You were terminated for your carelessness, shall we say?

"As far as the telephone company is concerned," Treese continued, "it was only a matter of time before they fired you also. Not only were you flaking off a couple of hours every day on company time, but there was a call last week from a subscriber who lost the billfold out of her purse the same day you installed an extension in her bedroom. She wondered if maybe it had fallen into your toolbox by mistake."

"Okay, Mr. Treese, I get the picture," Dall said. "You can spare me the rest of the sordid details." He stood up to leave.

"Just a minute," Treese said. "I thought you were interested in a job."

"Not any more. I don't like being checked up on."

Jerome Hollis, who had remained silent since handing Treese the folder on Dall, chuckled silently.

"I don't blame you, Dall," he said. "If I had your background I wouldn't like it either."

"Why don't you go chase an ambulance, shyster?" Dall retorted coldly.

Hollis flushed and was about to speak again when Treese held up a conciliatory hand.

"Relax, both of you," he said easily. He looked up at Dall, who was still standing. "There's a purpose to all this, Jack. I want to help you."

"When I want to be reformed," Dall said, "I'll find a social worker."

"Who said anything about reforming you? The kind of job I've got in mind couldn't be handled by anyone who had reformed." Treese smiled again. "Do you want to sit back down now and talk about it?"

Dall returned to his chair. "That last remark got you my undivided attention."

"Good." Treese leaned back and lighted a cigar. "As Lydia mentioned, I'm in the importing business. I buy large quantities of foreign-made goods and have them shipped by freighter to one of three warehouses I have near the docks. From those warehouses, I reship the merchandise in smaller quantities to wholesale outlets in thirty cities. I make a modest profit. You know what I mean?"

"Sure," said Dall. "Now tell me how you manage to live in a place like this."

"That's what I was leading up to. You see, Jack, there's a fourth warehouse in my organization. It operates exactly the same way as the other three, except that it handles only special shipments of merchandise. Are you beginning to get the picture?"

Dall nodded. "Already got it. Either narcotics or hijacked cargo."

"You're as smart as I thought you'd be," Treese said. "It's the latter: hijacked merchandise. I stay strictly away from narcotics." He flicked an ash from his cigar. "What I'd like to do for you, Jack, is put you in charge of that fourth warehouse. Your job would be to receive shipments, get them uncrated and repacked into smaller orders, and send them out by legitimate trucking lines to the thirty wholesalers I mentioned.

"The work isn't really hard, but it does require a certain amount of stamina. The cargo has to be redistributed as quickly as possible; you start working as soon as it's unloaded and you keep at it until it's ready for reshipment. The average time it takes to handle a load is twelve to fifteen hours. Delivery can be any time of the day or night and you'll handle at least one but no more than two shipments per week."

Treese leaned back in his chair. "Questions?"

"Just one. How do you get away with it?"

Treese looked over at his lawyer. "You tell him, Jerome."

"The main thing that we have going for us," Hollis said, "is that we avoid violating federal laws. We handle only intra-state cargo, never an interstate shipment. Second, we have a very tight operation. The only people directly involved are Mr. Treese, me, and the man who presently handles the number four warehouse."

"That's Charley," said Treese. "Been with me a long time, but he's getting old. Got rheumatism now and he can't keep up the pace any more. I'm going to buy him a house in Florida and let him retire."

"If it's a three-man operation, who does the hijacking?" asked Dall.

"We deal with a small but reliable group of freelancers," Hollis answered. "They grab loads that come into the San Pedro docks and are being trucked to Los Angeles. Also, in order to keep the heat evenly distributed, they pick up night loads leaving the San Francisco and San Diego docks for points north and east. This makes it look like the jobs are the work of local hijackers in each area."

It hasn't occurred to the law in either city that the only reason night departures are grabbed is to give us time to get the truck to L.A. before the load is missed."

"What do you do with the driver?" Jack Dall wanted to know.

"Turn him loose with his truck in another city after it's all over."

Dall sat back and rubbed his chin. "It sounds too simple," he said thoughtfully.

"That's why it's worked so well for so long," Leo Treese said. He placed his cigar on a silver ashtray and folded his hands on the desk. "Do you want the job?"

"For how much?"

"One thousand dollars for every load you handle."

"You've got yourself a new employee," Dall said unhesitatingly.

"Good." The three men stood up. "Jerome will take you down and introduce you to Charley. Work out some way for him to get in touch with you when the next shipment is expected. You can work with him for three or four loads and then when you've got the hang of it, I'll put the old man out to pasture. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

Dall and Jerome Hollis started to leave.



"There's one more thing, Jack."

Dall turned back from the door. "You want me to stay away from your daughter, right?"

"I'd appreciate it if you would. Nothing personal, you understand. It's just that Lydia doesn't know about the aspect of my business that you'll be involved in. If you two were seeing each other, there's always the chance that she might find out. I'll feel better knowing that she's completely removed from anything that might harm her."

Dall nodded. "You're the boss, Mr. Treese."

He and Jerome Hollis continued out the door.

Dall met Lydia that night at a lounge near the university.

They sat at a small round table in an intimately lighted back corner.

"You didn't mention to your father that you were meeting me, did you?"

"No," said Lydia. "When you called, you asked me not to. I wish you'd tell me why."

"Your father doesn't want us to see each other. He made it a condition of my job. I asked you to meet me because I—well, I didn't want you to think that I didn't want to see you."

Lydia shook her head and frowned. "I can't imagine why Daddy would do a thing like that."

"I can," Dall told her. "As he said this afternoon, you're all he's got. And I'm not exactly the ideal suitor for a girl like you. I've jumped around from one job to another; I don't have any family background; I haven't even been to college. I suppose it's natural for a father to be concerned about things like that."

"How do you feel about it?" Lydia asked.

"Sick," said Dall. "Meeting you is the best thing that ever happened to me. How do you feel?"

"The same. Sick." She took one of his hands in both of hers. "I'll talk to Daddy about it. He'll just have to reconsider, that's all."

"I'd rather you didn't," Dall said. "Your father has given me a good opportunity to get ahead; he's going to have me trained to become one of his warehouse managers. I think I can make him change his mind about me if I have a little time. I think he's a fair man and if I prove myself to him, I believe he might let us see each other without us forcing the issue."

"Well and good. But what do we do in the meantime?" Lydia wanted to know.

"We could see each other quietly," Dall said. "Just not say anything about it until your father feels differently about us."

"I don't like to do things on the sly like that."

"Neither do I. But it's better than not seeing each other at all."

"How often could we meet?"

"As often as you like, as long as your father doesn't get suspicious."

"When we meet, where will we go? What will we do?"

"Whatever we want to do. We can go to movies, or take walks along the ocean, or just sit somewhere and talk like we're doing now. Or—" He paused, looking frankly at her. There was no mistaking what he was thinking.

"Or what?" Lydia asked.

"I have a little kitchen apartment," he said. "It isn't anything like you're used to, but it's clean and it's quiet. And it has a private entrance in the back."

"Take me there, Jack," she said, squeezing his hand urgently. "Take me there now."

Lydia continued to hold tightly to his hand as they got up and left the lounge.

On Monday Dall spent the morning with Charley, being shown around the warehouse. It was a long, rectangular room constructed entirely of concrete block. Four large work tables were located near the center of the floor. One wall contained bins full of fold-out shipping cartons of many sizes, along with corrugated filler and self-stick sealing tape. The opposite wall was bare except for wooden floor platforms on which incoming cartons were stacked. At the rear of the room was a small office. At the front was a hinged overhang door large enough for a semi trailer to back through.

"When a load comes in," the old man said, "it gets stacked against the wall. Now let's say for instance that it's a shipment of Swiss watches. You open the first case and stack the boxes of watches on one of the work tables. Then you take your master distribution list—it's

back in the office there, under a .45 automatic we keep in the desk drawer for protection. You take that master list and you start filling orders.

"I know the thing by heart I been doing it so long. The first city on the list is Atlanta. There are eighteen wholesalers in Atlanta that have standing orders for any merchandise Mr. Treese can provide. Some of them take as few as a dozen each; others take up to a gross. Your job is simply to pack whatever quantity is indicated on the master list, slap a label on the box, stack all outgoing boxes on the racks up near the door, and fill out a bill of lading for every city you'll be shipping to. When all the orders are filled for all thirty cities, and all the boxes are stacked according to destination, then you call a freight line and ship the load out. That's all there is to it."

"Who makes up the labels?" Dall asked.

"They come from Mr. Treese. He has an office downtown that handles the invoicing of his three legitimate warehouses. He has the labels for these loads typed up along with labels for his legitimate customers."

Dall sat up on one of the work tables and let his legs dangle. "Tell me something, Charley, just between you and

me. With these other warehouses handling legitimate business, how come Breese is in the hot goods racket?"

"For the same reason you are, the same reason I am," answered the old man. "Money."

"That doesn't figure," said Dall. "He must make plenty in his regular business."

"He makes peanuts," Charley told him unequivocally. "The whole thing is a cover-up. The stuff he imports is cheap junk; he practically gives it away. Of course, his books show that he nets a neat profit every year. They just don't show where it comes from."

Dall shook his head incredulously. "You mean he records the income he gets from hijacked goods?"

"That's right. Plows it right into the peanuts he makes from straight goods. Pays taxes on it, too; they'll never get Leo Treese on a tax rap."

Charley sat up on the table opposite Dall. He filled a pipe and lighted it. "Let me tell you something, kid. You're a mighty lucky young man to get cut into a setup like this. I been in one racket or another for forty-five years, and this is the nearest thing to perfect I ever saw. There's almost no way to get burned in this deal. The hijackers don't work for Treese;

they're freelancers. If they got caught, chances are they'd dummy up; but if they didn't, if they blew the whistle on the whole oeration, there'd be no way they could prove it.

"We're a legitimate import firm; we'd deny ever taking a shipment from them. Even if we got caught with a shipment, the law still couldn't prove criminal intent; we'd just say we accepted delivery by mistake, thinking it was one of our regular deliveries. Why, even if we got caught shipping the hot goods, we could still claim the whole thing was a mistake, because as soon as we know a load is on the way, we have a backdated order typed up for the same general kind of merchandise. The copy of that order is in Treese's files downtown by the time we start redistributing the stuff. The original order never goes out; it's destroyed. But if we ever have to, we can swear it did go out and got lost in the mail. I tell you, kid, we're covered from every angle. It's fool-proof."

"Sure sounds like it," Dall said. He rubbed his hands together. "When do I go to work?"

"Tomorrow night," Charley said. "We'll have a load of gold pen-and-pencil sets that are on their way to the export docks

from a plant in Sacramento. The load will be snatched just before it gets to Los Angeles. We'll get it a couple of hours later. Be ready to work at midnight."

"I'll be here," said Dall.

When he met Lydia that night, Dall told her that he might be working night shifts now and then during his warehouse training; they made arrangements to meet for a few hours in the afternoon on those occasions. For the rest of the time, however, they would meet in the evening like any other steady couple. They would go somewhere for dinner, then to a movie, then to Dall's little apartment. Or they would pick up a pizza and stay in and watch television with their feet propped up together on a beer case covered with a blanket that they used for a footstool.

Whatever they did, they were together at least four, sometimes five nights a week. The other night Lydia felt she had to spend with her father because he was alone. She lied to him about her nights out, saying she was seeing a pre-med student she had recently met. That pleased Leo Treese immensely and Lydia promised to have her new boyfriend out for dinner when final exams and graduation were over.

After working with Charley on the load of pen-and-pencil sets, Dall was free for five days. Then he was called in to work early one morning to help handle a load of packaged golf balls that had been hijacked outside San Diego. A week later he worked at night again: a truckload of 35 mm. cameras. Then it was digital calendar clocks, then high powered binoculars.

Dall learned quickly and worked well. By the time he worked the third load, he was practically doing it himself. By the fourth load Charley was just supervising. When the shipment of binoculars came in, Dall handled the whole job by himself while Charley dozed in the office. He was so good at it by then that he reduced the old man's redistribution time by one-third.

The next time Dall was called in, Charley wasn't there. Instead of Charley, he was met by Leo Treese.

"It's your baby from now on, Jack," Treese said. "Charley's on his way to Florida. There'll be a delivery of transistor radios arriving in a few minutes. I'll just stick around and see how you handle it."

"Okay," Dall said, nodding. He hung up his jacket and started folding shipping cartons.

"I'm glad you took my advice about Lydia," Treese said, watching him work. "From the way she acted, I thought at first that she had fallen for you. But I guess I was mistaken; she started dating a young medical student about a week later. From the frequency of their dates, it looks like they may be serious."

"I'm glad everything worked out to suit you," Dall said.

Just then the warehouse bell rang from outside. Dall raised the hydraulic overhang door and a large semi-van immediately backed in. As soon as the door was closed again, the driver and two other men got out and began unloading the cargo.

Treese stood off to the side while Dall gave them a hand stacking the cargo.

It took slightly more than an hour to get all the cases of transistor radios off the truck and against the wall. As soon as the last case was in place, the three men climbed back into the truck and were quickly gone. They would receive their payment at another location, through Jerome Hollis, Treese's lawyer. After closing the big overhang door again, Dall turned to Treese.

"Charley said there was a .45 around here somewhere for protection, but he never did say

exactly where. Why don't you show me as long as you're here."

"Sure," Treese said. "It should be right in the drawer with the master list, unless Charley moved it."

Dall followed Leo Treese back to the rear office. Treese opened the middle drawer and picked up a blue military automatic. "Here it is, same as it's always been. I'm surprised you haven't seen it before this."

"Too busy learning about everything else, I guess," Dall said. He waited until Treese had put the gun back and closed the drawer. Then he went over to his jacket and took a police special and a badge case from a hidden inside pocket. He opened the badge case for Treese to see.

"Sit down in that chair," he ordered. "Put both hands on the desktop."

Treese stared at him almost dumbly. "I don't believe it. An inside man? You? It can't be. I had you checked out. I don't believe it."

"You'd better believe it," Dall said. "It's the last thing you'll ever have a chance to believe."

As soon as Treese was seated and had both hands on the top of the desk, Dall raised the police special and shot him three times in the chest.

Three days later a closed session coroner's inquest into the death of Leo Treese was held at the County Courthouse. Dall was the third witness to testify.

"State your name and occupation, please?" said the County Counsel.

"John Doyle. I'm an investigator for the state attorney general's office." He noticed that Treese's lawyer, Jerome Hollis, was watching him with a frown from the other counsel table.

"Have you had occasion to use any other name recently?" the county representative asked.

"Yes. I've been using the name Jack Dall for the purpose of doing undercover work in a statewide hijacking investigation."

"Were you so engaged in that investigation three nights ago?"

"I was."

"Did you at that time shoot and kill the subject of this inquest, one Leonard Albert Treese?"

"I did."

"Tell us, please, the details of that homicide."

"I had witnessed the subject accept a delivery of merchandise which I knew to be hijacked cargo," Dall said. "I had then identified myself as a

law enforcement officer and was attempting to place the subject Treese under arrest. While I was doing so, the subject grabbed a gun from his desk drawer and fired one shot at me. The shot missed. I returned his fire and shot him three times."

"What did you do after you had determined that the subject was dead?"

"I immediately contacted the local police and advised them of the homicide. I also requested an All Points Bulletin be broadcast in an attempt to apprehend the delivery truck."

"Was the truck apprehended?"

"Yes, but the hijackers had abandoned it. None of them were caught."

"One last question. Had you obtained evidence against anyone else in your investigation other than the subject Treese?"

Dall glanced at Jerome Hollis again. The attorney's eyes were riveted to him.

"No," Dall answered.

"Thank you. Nothing further," the county counsel said.

"Any questions on behalf of the family, Mr. Hollis?" the coroner asked.

"None, thank you," Hollis replied.

Dall was excused. The next and last witness was the senior detective on the team of police

who responded to Dall's call from the warehouse. He testified that upon arriving at the scene he had found the subject Treese dead from three gunshot wounds in the chest. The subject was clutching a .45 caliber automatic from which one round had been fired. The discharged bullet was found lodged in the doorframe of the office.

On the basis of the evidence it had heard, the coroner's jury deliberated only ten minutes. Their verdict was that the death of Leo Treese had been justifiable homicide.

When Dall left the courthouse, he spotted Jerome Hollis's blue Continental on the parking lot and walked over to it. Hollis was waiting in the car. Dall got in and the dapper attorney drove off the lot.

"So you were an inside man all along," said Hollis. "I should have known; you checked out too perfect."

"I checked out perfect because it was arranged that way," Dall replied. "We put a nail in Lydia Treese's tire so she'd have the flat. The two motorcycle freaks who were bothering her were undercover narcotics officers. The telephone company cooperated with us by lending us the truck and planting a fictitious employee folder in their personnel

records. Those other jobs that you traced back on me were rigged too."

"Very clever," said Hollis. "Very thorough. I'm sure Lydia will find it all quite interesting when I tell her. That's where I'm going right now, incidentally, in case you want to get out."

"I'll ride along," said Dall. "It'll give us a chance to talk."

"We don't have anything else to talk about."

"Sure we do. Aren't you curious to know why I didn't finger you as being in on the hijack operation?"

"I know why; you couldn't have proven anything. It would have been your word against mine."

"True," Dall admitted. "But I still could have made you sweat a little."

"Then why didn't you?" Hollis demanded.

"Because you've got a lot of work to do, Counselor. The Treese estate has to be probated. There's the legitimate end of his business; there's the house and grounds; I'm sure there must be considerable cash stashed somewhere."

"Just what in the hell does all that have to do with you?" Hollis demanded. "Lydia is the sole heir; she gets everything."

"That's right," Dall said. "And I get Lydia."

"You're out of your mind," the attorney snorted. "If there was ever any chance of that, it'll go up in smoke when she finds out you killed her father."

"She won't find out," Dall said easily. "She'll read that her father was killed by a cop named John Doyle. The name Jack Dall won't be released to the press. And since the inquest was a closed session, the record will be sealed."

Dall turned slightly in the seat. "You and Treese had a perfect setup, Jerome. There was no way in the world to bust your operation except with an inside man. That's why the attorney general's office went to such elaborate lengths to get me on the inside. I could have racked up the whole organization if I'd wanted to: the legitimate end of it with all those fake orders and invoices; the hijack boys; even you to some extent. But I didn't. I worked it very carefully so that nothing changed except Treese's removal."

Dall glanced out and saw that they were turning into the long drive that led up to the Treese mansion. "If you use your head, Jerome, the organization can remain intact. Six months from now it can start operating again just as if nothing happened. The only difference will be that I'll be

running things instead of Treese."

"You can go to hell," Jerome Hollis said. He pulled up directly in front of the house and parked.

"You're a fool if you don't buy this deal," Dall said flatly. "You had one client: Leo Treese and his organization. As soon as the estate is settled you'll have nothing; you'll be out in the cold. How are you going to pay for your Continentals and your tailormade suits then?"

"I'll work for Lydia. I'll handle the business affairs."

"In six months there won't be any business affairs. The legitimate end of the business will go bankrupt and you know it." Dall heard a door close and saw Lydia coming down the steps toward them.

"Better think twice, Counselor," he told the lawyer in the last moment of privacy they had. "It's a little late in life for you to start being poor."

Dall got out of the car to meet Lydia. She wore a simple black dress and her eyes were red from crying. Dall put his arms around her and she pressed her face against his chest.

"I've got something to tell you, Lydia," he said. "I know how you must feel finding out what kind of business your

father was really in. I wish I could make that part of it easier for you, but I can't; nobody can change the truth. But I do want you to know one thing: I was with your father an hour before he was killed. We had a long talk about you, man to man. Your father apologized for trying to keep us apart. He said he felt he'd misjudged me. He told me that you and I could see each other as often as we wanted to. He even went on to say something about it making him feel good to know that someone like me would be around to take care of you if anything happened to him."

"Did he, Jack?" Lydia asked

with tears in her eyes. "Did he really say all that?"

The other car door opened and Jerome Hollis came around to them. He laid a hand on Lydia's arm.

"Yes, Lydia, your dad really did say all that. I was there at the time, so I know."

Lydia Treese began to cry and buried herself in Dall's arms again. Dall patted her head gently and looked over at Jerome Hollis. The attorney brushed a bit of lint off his tailormade coat and leaned against the glossy fender of his Continental.

Both men waited patiently until Lydia Treese finished crying for her dead father.

In the NEXT issue of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE:

BLUE MURDER

The New Complete MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When thieves fall out, there can be plenty hell to pay—as well as a danger-laden payoff for Mike Shayne. With a set of fabulous blue diamonds in the hands of a gang of amateur crooks, both the underworld and the insurance people are crying for help. As usual, it is the Miami redhead they call for and, since the price is right, Mike Shayne shoulders the risk. And it almost proves fatal when a lovely insurance investigator enters at her charming best.

They had cheated her, used her, let their sneering brute strength have their way. She smiled. Now—now it was her turn...



HOUSE CALL

by GARY BRANDNER

MARTHA PENDARVIS clasped one blue-veined hand in the other as she watched the jiggling lines on the screen of her television set. From behind the cabinet came a series of grunts and muttered curses.

"Will you be able to repair it?" Martha asked.

Lloyd Bobick rose and wiped his palms across the white coveralls where they stretched over his stomach. "I can't do nothing with it here. I got to take it in to the shop."

"But you barely looked at it. How do you know it isn't a little tube or something?"

"Fixing TV's is my business, lady. If I tell you it's got to go to the shop, it's got to go to the shop."

"Oh dear, and I did want to watch the Paul Newman movie tonight. How much do you think it will cost me this time?"

Bobick kneaded the roll of fat under his chin. "From the looks of it I'd say forty, forty-five dollars. That's if you don't need a new picture tube."

"But it's doing the same thing it was when you fixed it last time, two weeks ago. Don't you guarantee your work?"

The television repairman drew himself up to his full five feet seven. "This may look like the same trouble, but I'm tellin' you it ain't. If you don't want me to fix it, okay, but it's still gonna cost you seven dollars and fifty cents for me makin' the trip out here."

"I do wish I knew what to do," Martha said. "It is at times like this that I miss the Judge the most."

"The Judge?"

"My late husband, Judge Henry Pendarvis. He passed away twenty-five years ago come February."

"Yeah. Well look, lady, I got other stops to make, so if you want to make up your mind—"

The grinding ring of the old-fashioned doorbell interrupted the conversation.

"Oh dear," Martha said, "you'll have to excuse me for a moment. There's someone at the door, and as you know, I'm all alone. Sometimes I wish Miss Walker were still here to help out. Please have a seat, Mr. Bobick." She fluttered out of the livingroom to the heavy front door and rattled open a series of burglar-foiling locks.

Ed Gilroy stepped into the foyer and peeked at himself in the hallway mirror as he spoke. "I got your car hooked up to the truck. I'll take it into the garage and tomorrow or the next day you can give me a call and I'll let you know what's wrong with it."

"My neighbor, Mr. Davidoff, said he thought it was just a dead battery."

Gilroy took out a comb and touched it lightly here and there to his long blond hair. "Who are you gonna believe, some old coot of a neighbor or me, a professional?"

Martha pulled aside the curtain and looked unhappily out to the street where her faithful old car was gaffed and hoisted behind the powerful looking tow truck.

"I was hoping I could have it tomorrow," she said. "There's a speaker at the Ladies' Club meeting I especially wanted to hear."

"No way," Gilroy said. "I

HOUSE CALL

won't be able to get at it before Wednesday at the earliest."

"Don't you sometimes provide cars for people to use when you have to keep theirs?"

"Are you kidding? Nobody gives out loan cars, any more. Who wants to be bothered with all the insurance paper work?"

"I see. At any rate, I do hope that this time you can give me a reasonably accurate estimate of the repair cost."

Gilroy turned from the mirror. "What do you mean."

"Last summer you said you could repair the transmission, or whatever it was, for seventy-five dollars, and your bill came to more than twice that.

"Look, that's the way it happens sometimes. You get inside one of these old clunkers, start poking around, and you find all kinds of things wrong. You just say the word and I'll drop your old bucket off the truck and leave it here. All that'll cost you is fifteen dollars for my time bringing the truck out."

"If only I knew what the Judge would do," Martha sighed. "He always knew what to do in business matters."

The doorbell ground once more and Martha placed a thin hand to her cheek.

"Dear me, everything at once. Please be seated, Mr.



Gilroy, over there with Mr. Bobick. I won't be a minute."

Ed Gilroy sat down on the opposite end of the sofa from the television repairman. The two of them eyed each other coolly, but neither spoke.

Martha opened the door to a soft-faced, elegant man in a beautifully tailored suit.

"Dr. Rome, it's so good of you to come."

A frown grew on the man's smooth features. "I understand there was an emergency, Mrs. Pendarvis."

"Oh, that. Well, I'm feeling much better now, thank you."

"Feeling better now?" the doctor echoed. "Madam, do you realize I broke my first rule by making a house call only because you convinced my girl on the telephone that you were in immediate danger of dying?"

Dr. Jamison never used to

mind coming to the house," Martha said. "In fact, he used to drop in sometimes just to see how I was and to pass the time of day."

"Dr. Jamison is dead, and I have more important things to do with my time."

"Yes, of course."

"I have been meaning to suggest, Mrs. Pendarvis, that you might be happier with Dr. Saul over on Walnut Street. He is closer to being one of your own generation."

"Walnut Street is all the way over on the other side of town," Martha protested. "I'm over seventy, you know, and it's not so easy for me to get around any more."

"Well, if you intend to stay with me you will have to accept the new way of doing things."

Martha sighed heavily. "Things used to be so much simpler. Dr. Jamison took such good care of me the time I slipped on the ice and broke my leg. And the Judge and Miss Walker were so good, they wouldn't let me do a thing around the house. Ah, well, times change."

The doctor glanced impatiently at his wrist watch. "I really must go now. There are people waiting in my office."

"First, will you answer a question for me, Dr. Rome, as long as you're going to charge

me for this visit anyway? You are going to charge me, aren't you?"

"Well, ahem, I feel that for the time I spent a token fee, say twenty dollars, would not be out of line."

"That's what I thought. What I wanted to ask you was about those pills you prescribed for me last month. I paid more for them than I do for my month's groceries. I asked my friend Professor Kelty up at the college to analyze them in his laboratory and tell me what was in them. He said they were nothing more than sugar pills. A placebo, I believe, is the term."

"It is not an uncommon practice, Mrs. Pendarvis, to prescribe a placebo for complaints that are clearly of a neurotic origin."

"I see. Doctor, I believe I will take your advice about switching to Dr. Saul. If you will wait here a moment I'll get your twenty dollars and our account will be settled." She turned to Bobick and Gilroy who were fidgeting on the sofa. "I'll pay you gentlemen too. Excuse me."

Left alone, the three men—TV repairman, auto mechanic, and doctor gazed uncomfortably around the room, avoiding each other's eyes. In a few minutes Martha returned carrying a tray that held a teapot and

cups. She set the tray on a low table before the sofa and looked around with a smile.

"I hope you will take tea with me, gentlemen, before you leave. I don't often have such handsome callers."

All of the men spoke at once.

"Look, lady, I got other work at the shop."

"Just give me the towing fee and I'll unhook your car."

"Mrs. Pendarvis, there are patients waiting."

"Is that so much to ask?" Martha said. "That you take one cup of tea with a lonely old woman? After all, I *am* paying each of you for your time."

Lloyd Bobick started to say something, but Dr. Rome silenced him with a sharp glance.

"Very well, Mrs. Pendarvis," the doctor said, "one cup. Then I must go, as I am sure these other men must."

Bobick and Gilroy nodded in agreement.

"I shall pour," Martha said happily. She inclined the teapot to let the steaming liquid flow into each of the cups. "Drink up now, gentlemen, and I'll go get your money." Smiling at each of them in turn, she left the room.

"What a nutty old broad," said Bobick.

"If it wasn't for my towing

fee I'd split right now," said Gilroy.

"Be quiet," said the doctor. "She'll hear you. Just humor the woman and we can all leave in a few minutes."

Bobick lifted his cup and took a noisy sip. "Ugh, it tastes terrible."

Gilroy lifted his cup. "We might as well finish it or we'll never get out of here." He took a swallow, shuddered, then took another.

Dr. Rome took a taste from his cup, then stopped to sniff at the contents. He frowned for a moment, then shook his head and drank.

"Aaagh!"

Lloyd Bobick's strangled cry snapped the other men to attention. With both hands clamped to his stomach the repairman lurched to his feet. His cup and saucer clattered to the floor.

"What's the matter with—" Ed Gilroy began. But before finishing the sentence he doubled over as though kicked in the midsection. His forehead banged on the tabletop.

Dr. Rome stared in shock at the sudden agony of his companions. He raised his cup and sniffed at it again. His face contorted in surprise, then he too clutched at his stomach and fell writhing to the floor.

Martha Pendarvis re-entered

the room then and stood with her hands clasped, looking down at the retching men.

Dr. Rome gasped, "Poison . . . in the tea."

"Yes, Doctor," Martha said. "Strychnine. But I suppose you have identified it by now."

"Why, lady?" groaned Bocabick the repairman. "Why are you doing this to us?"

"Because you are cheaters," Martha explained. "All of you. And as the Judge always said, cheaters must pay. And pay they did when the Judge was on the bench. None of your namby-pamby slaps on the wrist like they hand down today. Oh no, with the Judge presiding cheaters always got the maximum sentence."

"You can't do this," cried

Gilroy the mechanic. His body arched in convulsive spasms. "You're committing murder."

"It's too late to plead for mercy. Your sentence has been passed. Now you must pay."

Dr. Rome, gasping for breath, croaked, "Mrs. Pendarvis, think of your husband's memory. This is not his kind of justice. In the name of the Judge, get my bag from the car so I can save our lives.

Martha eased her old body into a comfortable rocker and folded her hands. "I'm afraid you're calling upon the wrong memory, Doctor. You see, the Judge was a cheater too. He never suspected that I knew about him and Miss Walker until the day in this very room when I poisoned him."



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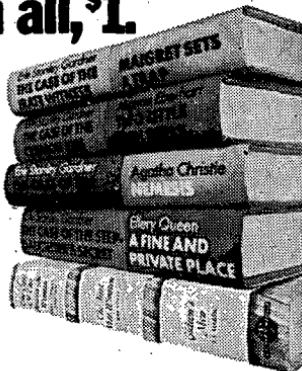
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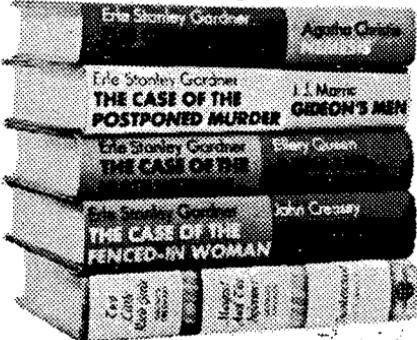
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